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Someone's calling your Swatch: Youth, technology and power

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Someone's Calling Your Swatch

Youth, technology and power

BY

TAN, Su-Lyn

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of

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At the Faculty of Arts, Department of Media Studies,
Edith Cowan University

1996

Abstract

Common assumptions about youth and youth culture exist in academic, as well as other adult cultures. These assumptions underlie policy decisions, programming choices, and even the way we (as adults) treat youth. This study proposes to examine Singaporean youth and their use of pagers, in terms of Foucauldian theories of power; in an attempt to draw critical attention to these common assumptions. The intention is to explore the ambiguities of such common assumptions as sites of power relations; relations that are inherent to all societies in one way or another.

The pager is not a conventional focus for communication research. Yet it is set firmly, particularly in Asia, in the networks of communication that form part of the everyday lives of many people. This critical inquiry focuses on the construction of youth and technology (as discursive categories) in the media, academic research, legislation, business/advertising and journalistic writing; and looks at how these discourses intersect with the promotion of pagers and pager use.

In focusing on the context of Asia, this approach problematises bounded conceptions of cultures and identities; and suggests that our understandings of youth and technology are more ideological than inherent. At the same time, I interrogate the connection of my self, my research, and its methodologies, to relations of power so that these aspects are not naturalised. The aim is to develop theorisations that are self-reflexive; recognising the “inescapability” of power. This is not a critique of the nature of power (whether it is good or bad), but rather a description of its presence, how it inflects all cultural practices and social life. It also raises the need, particularly in intellectual discourses, to acknowledge the reach of power.

By trying to examine the pager as a cultural artefact, this exercise poses questions for existing conceptions of what qualifies as a researchable media within the field of communication studies. It focuses attention on the conditions that have been set as to what is important, valued and legitimate work in communication studies. In broader terms, it similarly challenges our systems of sense-making and knowledge production. How do our existing knowledges of the relationship between technology/media and individuals, explain youth and pagers? And what does this reveal of their conditions of enunciation? This paper is a pointed interrogation of the technologies of power that are imbricated in the ways we make sense.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my parents, my sister Fay, and Pak for their patience and support. I would also like to express deep appreciation for the guidance and encouragement from both my supervisors Associate Professor Robyn Quin and Professor John Hartley; without whom this paper would not have taken seed.

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Introduction

When your mobile doubles as a computer and you can pocket your modem

Electronics are tricky beasts: shrinking, morphing, adapting to the culture of the day, the week, the decade.

Rosenthal (1996, p. 10)

Electronics *are* tricky beasts, especially as they are becoming smaller, more portable, and wireless, whilst providing greater applications. In this section of the introduction I would like to establish an idea of the scope of these electronics that are not only morphing but integrating (for example, the Nokia 9000 is a personal digital assistant in a GSM cellular phone, integrated with data and voice services; i.e. you can talk, fax and surf the net with it), and suggest that there is a move towards electronics that are so compact and portable that they can be worn on or about the body. Consider Telstra's "Priced to fit every pocket" mobile phone advertising campaign (refer to Appendix); or the Calvin Klein-styled television advertisements for the new Nintendo Game Boy Pocket. Not only are these electronics pocketable, but they are wearable as well; meaning that the objects themselves are gaining status as accessories. Much like the ubiquitous wristwatch, more of these "tricky beasts" are morphing and adapting themselves not only to our everyday lives, but to our bodies and to our selves.

These electronics are establishing a significant presence. Take for example the Surfer modem from Psion Dacom (figure 0.1). It is supposed to be “so hip you’ll want to wear it” and it even comes with its own “neat, skin-tight Surfsuit in one of four brilliant surf-style colours”! Or the Motorola Personal Messenger 100D radio modem, where for the price of a cellular phone connection you can connect to your regular Internet supplier or e-mail provider: “you can pocket the Motorola and only plug it in [to your portable notebook] when you want to read your messages” (Harden, 1995, p. 6). SEND-IT is designed as a toy for kids: “a small personal diary-style device with a slim beeper-like design [it is worn around the wrist], you enter messages of up to 30 characters on the LCD screen . . . pick from one of the 100 names you’ve entered and the message gets sent out through the air waves and received by another” (Rosenthal, 1996, p. 11). These are only some of the communication tools that come into existence everyday, providing possible reconfigurations of our means of communication and contributing to an increasingly technologised reality. It prompts the question of *how* people are actually communicating, and whether communications studies has overlooked this plethora of fragmented practices that negotiate how people make sense of their worlds.



surfer

The modem so hip
you'll want to wear it.

Surfer from Psion Dacom is a real cool modem.
It's cool because it gets you onto the Internet.

It lets you send faxes and e-mail when only
the written word will do. And then there's voice-mail,
your own personal digital answering service.

Surfer even comes with its own neat, skin-tight Surfsuit
in one of four brilliant surf-style colours.
So don't be a wannabe – call one of the resellers below
or get down to your nearest retailer today.

Action 0800 333333
Powermark plc 0181 956 7000
Simply Computers 0181 498 2125
Software Warehouse 01675 466467
Or visit your local PC World, Dixons,
The Link or Currys store.

33.6Kbps
modem
£179
(RRP incl. VAT)



PSION
DACOM
Tel: 01908 26 16 86
www.psiondacom.com

Figure 0.1 Advertisement for Surfer modem from Psion Dacom in *The Guardian* (1996)

This “electronification”, to use Rosenthal’s (1996, p. 10) term, of the body may seem like simply a fusion of marketing and techno-magic, bearing little *cultural* significance. They appear gimmicky and one feels a sense of incredulity reading about their fantastical functions. The aforementioned gadgets gain far more journalistic and promotional, rather than academic, attention. Yet they are part of a growing number of products that are being promoted and *used* not only as functional, but as fashionable objects. Whilst they appear more like advertising fluff (why would anyone want to wear her modem?), the image of a youthful, attractive female, with a modem hanging from her hipline, places the object in a context and use so distanced from its familiar functions that it *is* curious. It draws attention to the other electronics we wear on ourselves and interrogates the techno-body relationships we have otherwise naturalised. What does this mean? *Why* does this mean? And how does this relate to our understanding of communication? Wark’s (1993) description of artist Stelarc’s performances, provides a vivid image that draws attention to this relationship between technology and body:

He appears strapped and wired to any and every device. Some are devices he controls through the movement of his muscles. Some are devices which control him, triggering involuntary parabolas and disconcerting jerks . . . a state of permanent dependence and symbiosis with what video artist Peter Callas calls technology as territory. (p. 71)

The relationships we draw between technology and people are not natural. Stelarc shows this literally by “electronifying” himself. Yet these devices parallel the ones we wear on or carry about ourselves every day; devices like watches, mobile telephones, and pagers. The core issue of this thesis is to focus attention on this relationship of “dependence and symbiosis”; to ask how we make sense of this relationship. What are the assumptions we make in our explanations of this relationship between technology and people? Ultimately, this is with the intention of asking how the relationship of dependence and symbiosis, is revealing of the ways of organising and making sense of our cultural and social worlds.

Techno accessories for hip teenagers

The title of this paper, *Someone's Calling Your Swatch*, may be misleading because I am studying pagers and not Swatch watches. It is actually taken from a brochure promoting Swatch the Beep, "the first pager that's also a Swatch watch" (Swatch, n.d.). I have chosen it because it plays with the idea of telecommunication through an almost mundane technology - the watch. To take a *Swatch* watch, worn as much for fashion as for function, is doubly significant as it draws attention to the ornamental potential and cultural value of the objects that we carry about our selves.

The Swatch watch carries about itself a sense of spectacle, of to-be-looked-at-ness. Swatch designs are often characterised as self reflexive and attempting to construct a sense of intertextuality; a tongue-in-cheek critique of popular culture. And their advertisements (refer to Appendix) position the Swatch brand as anti-establishment (they advertise under the label "Irony"), as irreverent (their products are not only shockproof, but splashproof, boreproof and priceproof), and as trendsetting ("the others just watch" is their tagline). Thus a "big, daft Swatch watch with a pager built in" (Sootheran, 1996), as British magazine *Max* describes The Beep, is then even more *spectacular*.

Figure 0.2 is from a The Beep brochure. The woman's outlandish see-through black lace and tulle outfit fringes between high fashion and garish tastelessness; the sight of her at a public phone booth is a bizarre juxtaposition of the totally unconventional and the everyday. It is this defiance of binaries, the horror of the anomalous sign that Swatch represents. To me, The Beep epitomises the shift from promotion of the pager solely as a business and professional tool, to promotion of it as a personal accessory. Whilst it encompasses the pager's existing uses, The Beep is particularly linked with style and youth. It is a shift that is part of a broader development in the marketplace (consider again the Psion Dacom modem advertisement, figure 0.1). And it is in this sense that I refer to The Beep as spectacular; an object of excessive signs, drawing attention to itself as both functional object and cultural artefact.



Figure 0.2 Image from Swatch brochure (Swatch, n.d.)



Just a call away ... the Traka helps teenagers keep in touch

Techno accessories for hip teenagers

TRAKA PAGER

A Motorola pager is the hip New York teenager's ultimate fashion accessory — which has a lot to do with the constant barrage of Motorola pager advertising on MTV, the rock music TV channel.

In this senseless shopping season before Christmas, Motorola is targeting Australian teenagers with its Traka pager. You may have already seen one of the Traka television advertisements depicting teenagers swanking about town proudly wearing their pagers.

Traka isn't as pretty and colourful as the pagers shown on MTV. It is chunky and matt-black sensible, a sturdy pager featuring a simple 12-character backlit display, audible tone or silent vibration alert, 16-message memory, onscreen clock and easy two-button operation.

As Traka is packaged for the youth market, Motorola claims it "will retail at around 15 per cent of the cost of a traditional adult paging service". Traka retails for \$50, and the Link Telecommunications 12-month unlimited pager subscription and connection fee costs \$75 all up. My checking revealed the standard adult one-line text service costs around \$350-\$400 per year, while the Traka costs about \$124 per year. Hmm, more like 30 per cent.

The Traka is cheaper because it is numeric — that is, the message system is based on secret agent number codes, such as "64", which could mean "Come home, now!"

Traka owners can also purchase pager-specific accessories, such as "fashionable and functional pouches" and "bungee cords", for a few dollars more.

For further information, phone 1800-650-850.

GAME BOY POCKET

Young consumers will also be hit hard this Christmas by super-sexy Calvin

d.Vices



Jackie Cooper

Klein-styled television advertisements for the new Nintendo Game Boy Pocket. This is the latest version of this handheld, pocket-size games system first released in 1989.

You know the kind of ad. A Kate Moss lookalike, wearing a tight white singlet and low-slung jeans, slowly slips her hand into the pocket of a pretty chisel-jawed boy's jeans.

Then, with a sulky '90s teenager pout, the Kate Moss lookalike pulls out the Game Boy Pocket, housed in its shiny new silver casing. The chisel-jawed boy, of course, is now smiling.

The new Game Boy Pocket certainly is much shinier and brighter than the first version. Nintendo claims that since 1989 it has sold 48 million hardware systems and 218 million games worldwide.

The Game Boy Pocket is one third smaller and half the weight of the original, but it still has the original screen size of 2.6 inches.

However, it uses a sharper and brighter black-and-white LCD screen than the original.

The Game Boy Pocket runs all the existing games and is powered by two AAA batteries. It retails for around \$100, while the games cost from \$30-\$60.

For further information, phone (03) 9265-9900

jackiec@ozemail.com.au

Figure 0.3 Press clipping "Techno accessories for hip teenagers" in *The Weekend*

Australian (Cooper, 1996)

The sleek shapes and colours of the new generation of pagers this paper is interested in, have themselves been compared to Swatch designs; “tipping a hat to classic Swatch designs, the Motorola Memo Express provides a street-smart alternative to the upwardly mobile phone that could usher in a new pager-age” (Sutherland in *The Face*, 1994). According to Cooper (1996) in *The Weekend Australian*, “a Motorola pager is the hip New York teenager’s ultimate fashion accessory - which has a lot to do with the constant barrage of Motorola pager advertising on MTV, the rock music TV channel” (figure 0.3). The “new” pager is more associated with youth culture and in particular American culture rather than business. Like Cooper (1996), *The Face* explains that “in the US they’re as much a part of hip hop culture as Jeeps and sneakers” (Sutherland, 1994). Yet is this merely just another American led fashion trend that supposedly gullible youth across the world are jumping to emulate? In a survey of Asian youth in *Asia Magazine* (“Icons of our time”, 1996), the authors suggest that:

Technology - or rather hi-tech gadgets and gimmicks - follows a close second to fashion on the must have front. This generation is plugged into the 1990s icon of technology . . . and more than 70 per cent describe [the Internet] as the most indispensable technological invention of the decade . . . mobile phones rate as the next indispensable hi-tech toy, followed by pagers. (pp. 10-11)

Fashion accessory, hip hop culture, hi-tech toy; the appeal of pagers is rationalised as an empty simulacrum of consumerist hipness for a category of pre-adults but post-children who are still at play. The articles I have cited refer to “New York teenagers”, “this generation” and “Asian youth” as if there are self-evident differences that guide these categorisations. Yet at the same time references are made to a global youth culture, and to youth at large as a biological category with generalisable qualities and developmental stages. What do these contradictory assumptions mean? Are they more revealing of the nature of youth, or of the strata of meaning-making that pervade our lives?

Youth, technology, power

It is one of the fundamental paradoxes of our social life that when we are at our most natural, our most *everyday*, we are also at our most cultural; that when we are in roles that look the most obvious and given, we are actually in roles that are constructed, learned and far from inevitable.

(Willis, 1979; cited in Turner, 1990, p. 2)

“Young people today”, “the future of our youth”; within adult cultures, these phrases presume a self-evident definition of youth. It is, as Willis (1979) points out, this inevitability that prompts questioning. Are youth and youth cultures as inevitable and taken for granted as they are made out to be? The accompanying image to Cooper’s (1996) article shows pre-pubescent or early-teenagers at a rock concert in liberatory celebration wearing their pagers. Whilst pagers in this incarnation may be relatively new to Australia, the image is a clichéd one that may well be used to sell Levi’s jeans, Nike shoes or Big Macs. The jeans worn on the hips, the tight-fitting tops; have become metonyms for Everyteen, the teenage equivalent of Everywo/man. It seems natural to assume that teenagers tend to dress alike and will want whatever they see on MTV; or that they are easily persuaded by gimmicks. It also seems obvious to then presume that youth need to be protected. Yet these are not intrinsic qualities of youth.

Foucauldian theory suggests that categories such as youth serve to codify individuals in terms of a hierarchy (within a segment/stage of training) to individualise/differentiate them as *novices* (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 70). It is about the power to define what youth lack; or what they are incapable of; what youth *are*. Therefore I speak of youth, not as a biological category (if there is one), but rather as a social construct and discursive category. And in the process, I question the power relations that inscribe such conceptions of youth.

Why then the pager and not Nike shoes or Levi's jeans? The pager brings in the element of technology. It is unlike most of the media that research chooses to study. Yet it is set firmly in the networks of communication that form part of the everyday lives of many people. Over the years, pagers have grown in popularity; an advertorial released by Motorola in *Asiaweek* (1996) claims that at the end of 1994 there were in excess of 70 million pagers installed in the world¹. By trying to examine the pager as a cultural artefact, this exercise poses questions for existing conceptions of what qualifies as a researchable media within the field of communication studies. I believe that it focuses attention on the conditions that have been set as to what is important, valued and legitimate work in communication studies.

¹ In Singapore alone 26.8 out of every 100 Singaporeans were using pagers in 1994, the highest penetration rate in the world (Singapore, 1995, p. 161). In Sweden, according to Sutherland (1994), the country took the pager to heart and sales increased by 1000 per cent in 1993. In Indonesia a service providing hit-music charts, weather forecasts and entertainment news through pagers was launched in December 1996 (Tong, 1996). And in Australia, the Traka pager for teenagers was introduced in November 1996.

What do we mean by technology? What do we conceive to be the relationship between technology and people? And how do these conditions frame our findings? The pager *is* a communication technology, yet it is *not* considered a particularly *important* technology worth examining. One could call it a boundary spanner. It traverses the uncertain line between the technologies communication studies should, and should not, examine.

However, the purpose of focusing on the boundaries is *not* to define what is and is not, what is in and out; but to look for how these lines of distinction are erected, crossed and policed.

Therefore in this thesis, I am not looking to produce a “better” definition of technology or youth; or to explicate the essential qualities of each category. But rather, the pager is taken as the site where these discourses are tested, stretched, juxtaposed and contradicted. My argument is that this study of the pager is an example of how discourses are interdependent rather than linear and self-contained. The significance lies in their interface and intersection.

“The elements of the ritual (‘the letters of the alphabet’) do not mean anything in themselves; they come to have meaning by virtue of the contrast with other elements” (Leach, 1976, p. 95). This social anthropological perspective is useful in approaching the pager because it addresses it not as an isolated object, but as a dynamic intersection and contradiction of discourses. The pager is therefore embedded in the social and cultural context of its use, gaining as well as giving meaning. This approach questions existing work around the media-audience-context relationship.

This paper is organised around two sections. Section A, which includes chapters one and two, focuses on interrogating our tools and methods of study. In chapter one, I argue that communication studies itself is a technique of knowing embedded in the ideological, social and cultural. Through the categorisation of individuals and objects (in this case specifically as youth/audience and technology), research itself inadvertently reproduces the conditions we try to critique. Chapter two juxtaposes this methodological dilemma onto the pager. By trying to examine an unconventional subject of study such as the pager, I suggest that the assumptions that underlie our existing methodologies and conclusions are challenged.

In Section B, I try to analyse the discourses of youth and technology, that encircle and intersect around the promotion, and explanation of, pagers and pager use. Through this, I intend to problematise the closed text-audience circuit that continues to dominate communication research, by showing that both youth and technology are unstable discourses that are often contradictory and are expressive of power relations.

Chapter three covers the historical construction of youth culture as one centred on hedonistic consumption. I stress the historical continuity of such analyses because these arguments are hardly ever positioned as such; critiques of youth culture often target the decadent *new* generation of youth as a malaise of modernity and *new* communication technologies. In chapter four, characterisation of youth as delinquents is examined. This is especially applied to Asian youth with the suggestion that such categorisations are expressive of issues about culture and cultural identity (in particular the making of the West as Other in relation to Asia).

Our discussions about the effects of technology and the problems of youth are not always about issues of technology or youth *per se*; just as the promotion of pagers to teenagers is not merely a marketing transaction. These discourses are interferences that draw on and construct our methods of sense-making. A consciousness of the terrain of power that contextualises sense-making is necessary for a theorisation of communication that recognises its integration with cultural structures; as the negotiation of meaning *within* culture.

Chapter One

There are in fact no masses, but only ways of seeing people as masses.
Williams (1989, p. 11)

The very idea of mass communication, simply multiple transmissions of a text to many individuals, makes it impossible for transmitter or receiver to personally know one another. Williams (1989, p. 11) argues that this inability to know tempts us to rationalise “the others” in our minds as an unknown mass: “the masses became a new word for mob: the others, the unknown, then unwashed, the crowds beyond one”. Whilst forms of mass communication such as newspapers, radio, film, television, have made information, news and entertainment more accessible to people; they have also positioned their audiences as faceless masses with generalisable traits and behaviours.

The idea of “the masses” is certainly not solely the result of mass communication, nor is mass communication as simplistic a process as that I have stated above. However, it remains that we have instituted different ways of seeing people as masses, whether as audiences, genders, classes, races, citizens, employees or age groups. It has become a formula for rationalising decisions at all levels of community be it academia, government, business, family, or individual. My point is that we have to try to recognise that masses do not group themselves naturally, but rather as Williams suggests in the above quote, they are a technique of sense making: “people assume all too easily that they are born into a ready-made world, and with normal relations to it, and that anything they say is subject to complete personal choice, and that above all it is the individual who communicates . . . but we have learned ways of thinking about this which stop us seeing the problem clearly” (Williams, 1989, p. 21). Learned ways of thinking are not necessarily negative, but we need to recognise them as learned, and as *connected* to social and political formations.

In this chapter, I argue that communication studies itself is a technique of knowing¹.

Communications research has focused critical attention on this polymorphous phenomena “communication” as its *subject* of analysis, whilst positioning itself outside as the *objective* “knowing”. By detaching the critic, the practice of research ignores its own context within knowledge production:

Nobody is free of these conditions, not even the virtuous man [*sic*] who, angered by the inhuman nature of this universe of information, transmits his own protest through the channels of mass communication, in the columns of a great newspaper or in the pages of a paperback printed in linotype and sold in railway station kiosks. (Eco, 1994, p. 31)

Within the field of communication studies, there is no unified *theory* of communication, but rather contesting *theories* of communication. I am not implying that there is a need to reinscribe the field into a monolithic form with prescribed methodologies (although in some places it is already conceived as such). But our tools of study are as contradictory as the conditions we aspire to study. By taking an overview of communication studies, its historical precepts and methodologies, I hope to position my thesis as an attempt to step away from looking at the two as separate entities: the objective *science* that will explicate the unwieldy *subject*. Within communication studies itself, there are learned ways of understanding, and methods of seeing people as masses. I argue that rather than simply asking how existing frameworks either explain or dismiss communication practices, there is the need to recognise that these frameworks may also limit what is considered an acceptable *subject* of study.

¹ According to Carey (1989, p. 169): “the new media centralise and monopolise civic knowledge and, as importantly, the techniques of knowing”. He argues that we thus lose the capacity to produce knowledge for ourselves. Therefore I take techniques of knowing to be learned ways of thinking. Hartley (1994) takes this further to suggest that mass communication studies has been operated as a technology of social control.

I have chosen to examine the pager because it is an anomalous object that challenges the assumptions of how we see things and people in relation to communication; how we understand technology and youth:

We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are. (Berger, 1972, pp. 8-9)

The definition of a subject of study is in itself an act of control, structuring relationships between the looking and the looked at. Because the pager refuses to fit easily into the way we see things, it poses the question too, of how we are limited by the way we see.

Communication and power

So many authors who know or do not know one another, criticise one another, invalidate one another, pillage one another, meet without knowing it and obstinately intersect their unique discourses in a web of which they are not masters, of which they cannot see the whole, and of whose breadth they have a very inadequate idea they communicate by the form of positivity of their discourse, or more exactly, this form of positivity defines a field in which formal identities, thematic continuities, translations of concepts, and polemical interchanges may be deployed.

Foucault (1972, pp. 126-7)

Foucault speaks of authors. But these authors do not necessarily have to be of the literary kind. His perspective suggests that the relationships and discourses around knowledge production are not natural or ecologically evolutionary. Our individual and collective understanding(s) of what communication studies is, its technologies, effects, roles and implications; is not a clear discourse that can be easily delineated. Within communication studies itself, the relationships between the practices of everyday life and theorisations of these practices are uncomfortable and contentious (Hermes, 1993; Frow, 1991). Likewise, these contradictory relationships persist in other spheres of knowledge production that contribute to the way we, as intellectuals, as citizens, as races, understand. Foucault's authors are therefore not wholly communicating through unique individual choice. The term "web" proposes that the way we understand communication is framed by a complex set of rules; what Foucault (1972, p. 128) calls the *archive* - the limit and forms of what can be said.

However, it is important to note that this does not imply an ahistorical, atemporal structure that defines what we may enunciate from a position outside of the archive. There is no ultimate unifying discourse that eludes our discovery; no need to pursue the possibility of a world singularly organised around the principles of universal reason, rationality and truth (which was the project of Enlightenment). According to McHoul and Grace (1993):

human subjects and historical events are not firm and discrete (id)entities but are fragmented and changing sites across which the flows of power move. (p. 41)

We mask this fragmentation and change by codifying individuals and positioning knowledge production as an authoritative means of explaining this flux. I refer to Foucault because he points out the complexity of our structures of sense-making - that it is not a matter of choosing one discourse above another as more legitimate or as the correct answer. This perspective also positions communication studies in relation to other “authors” of communication theory be they psychologists, marketers, educators, censors, or parents. As researchers in the academic sphere, we need to recognise that communication studies does not exist in isolation but rather interacts and competes with alternative discourses. We need to engage with these discourses, lest we pursue a discipline with neat little boundaries that expounds what it does know unproblematically, masking the indeterminacy within which it exists.

It is with this web of discourses that we form the bases of our economic, political, social and cultural arguments. To take communication as the generation of meaning, we therefore have to accept that the generation of meaning is a web:

It becomes therefore the discipline of interferences, the description of the concentric circles that surround works, underline them, relate them to one another, and insert them into whatever they are not. (Foucault, 1972, p. 137)

The communication act is therefore studied as multi-layered and multi-textual rather than as singular. And in this respect the pager is understood as interferences of technology, youth and culture. These complex networks of discourses can be said to form concentric circles, intersections and relations about the pager as a cultural artefact.

Technology in communication studies: The bounded text-audience circuit

We often discuss, with animation, this or that 'effect' of television, or the kinds of social behaviour, the cultural and psychological conditions, which television has 'led to', without feeling ourselves obliged to ask whether it is reasonable to describe any technology as a cause, or, if we think of it as a cause, as what kind of cause, and in what relations with other kinds of causes. The most precise and discriminating local study of 'effects' can remain superficial if we have not looked into the notions of cause and effect, as between a technology and a culture, a technology and a society, a technology and a psychology.

Williams (1990, p. 9)

Williams (1990, p. 125) argues that underlying investigations of the effects of television, are particular cultural models which tend to determine their scopes and methods. A position of technological determinism abstracts television from its intrication within its specific cultural context rendering it (the cultural model) transparent; constructing the idea that what is being studied is simply an object, a hermetically enclosed "technology" with its own internal laws of cause and effect. As Mercer (1986) argues:

[Cultural forms] cannot be taken to be, even in their 'realist' forms, expressive of a totality which might be society, a class, a community or history. On the contrary, they must be understood not as evidence of something to be located elsewhere, something profound or deep underlying them, but as the composite of surface technologies which elaborate and inscribe relations between class, community, nation and history. Not that there is nothing happening elsewhere - in the economy, in the courts, in the streets - but that these forms cannot be read off against that 'elsewhere'. (pp. 183-4)

Mercer's observations refer to popular literary and journalistic forms of writing. But he makes a valid point that implicates other contemporary cultural forms that may not be traditionally considered in such terms. Cultural forms do not exist as hermetically sealed, independent forces that merely effect and/or reflect society; but rather, as Mercer suggests, they are *in* society; a composite of surface technologies. The point, then, is that cultural forms are produced by this composite. The ways we perceive, use and understand them are inscribed by social and cultural relations. However, we continue to speak of technology as embodied in an object, and of the process of communication as working through a technology to an individual. And that individual is first and foremost identified by his or her relation to the technology - as an audience, a reader.

Yet audiences are at once consumers, citizens; among other roles projected upon them. I suggest that assumptions of vulnerable audiences are also related to assumptions of vulnerable citizens, consumers, employees. The pathologising of popular media readerships constructs them as the binary opposites of intellectual readerships². Wark (1996a) comments:

The expert, the master of the psy discourse, experiments on test subjects, looking for pathological effects. If he or she finds them, then the place of the psy expert in the social regulation of the media is legitimised. The psy expert therefore has a vested interest in finding pathological effects. (p. 100)

² See Hartley's (1994) argument that "intellectual discourse has created an imaginary 'other' out of popular media audiences . . . whose presumed characteristics can be explained by reference to the purposes, politics and prejudices of intellectual culture at large rather than by looking at audiences as such" (p. 95).

DeCerteau's (1979) work on the policing of families; Foucault's (1977) comparisons between schools and prisons as similar systems of control; Aries' (1960) conclusion that modern education and the modern family removed the child from adult society, creating the concept of childhood; are examples of research outside the field of communications studies that concur with this critique of the psy expert who is instrumental to social regulation. This paper's approach tries to step out of the psy discourse to ask how the network of discourses around the pager are expressive of the instruments of managing bodies and populations. It asks how subjects are produced, rather than what subjects are.

Critiques of communication technologies tend to construct technology in terms of the sensational moral dimensions of the representations of sex and violence on film, television, video, computer games or the Internet. In many ways the research around, and cultural regulation of, these technologies of mass media continue to frame each subsequent technology as "new whipping boys and new objects around which a moral panic has been raised" (Stockbridge, 1996, p. 132).

In spite of the research in communication studies over the last ten years arguing that the relationship between media and audience is far more complex than one of cause and effect³, cultural policy, censorship laws, journalistic commentary, community attitudes by and large *continue* to make the assumption that the media artefact is a thing that produces pathological effects⁴. This paper is in part an expression and analysis of my frustration in facing this awkward juxtaposition of academic theory and social policy.

³ See, for example, *Children and television* (Hodge & Tripp, 1986); *Television audiences & cultural studies* (Morley, 1992); *Reading audiences: Young people and the media* (Buckingham, 1993); and *Living room wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world* (Ang, 1996).

⁴ See press clippings such as "Danger in the airwaves" in *The New Paper* (Koid, 1995); "Best-selling Vampire game blamed for killing by 5 youths" in *The Straits Times* (1996); "Screen violence" in *The West Magazine* (Crompton, 1993); "Certain controls necessary to keep peace" in *The Straits Times* (Yeo, 1995); "Children's programs fall prey to bad influences" in *The Weekend Australian* (Sexton, 1995).

Best-selling Vampire game blamed for killing by 5 youths

NEW YORK — Five teenagers, who bludgeoned to death their friend's parents, were said to have been influenced by the best-selling game Vampire: The Masquerade.

With more than 500,000 copies sold since its creation in 1991, the game has its own jargon, hierarchy and dress, all related to an elaborate system of vampire clans.

Masqueraders role-play in full vampire garb. Enthusiasts pointed out that thousands of players enjoy the game with no ill effects.

The game reflects popular culture's long-running fascination with vampires.

On Nov 25, five teenagers accused of being vampire worshippers, including the slain couple's 15-year-old daughter, Heather Wendorf, beat Mr Richard Wendorf and his wife Ruth to death.

The discovery of the bludgeoned bodies, as the family poodle hovered protectively, stunned residents in Eustis, Florida, about 48 km northwest of Orlando.

With the teens in custody, Florida authorities were scheduled to decide this week whether to prosecute them as juveniles or adults for the killings. The case shone a spotlight on a growing underground culture of fantasy role-playing as vampires.

Police in Calloway County, Kentucky, where four of the teens are from, said they tortured puppies and drank one another's blood. They started with a fantasy game but crossed the line, police said, to a cult.

Defence lawyers have called the suspects scared youths and dismissed the vampire claims.

The Wendorfs' daughter had stayed in touch with one of the Kentucky teens, 16-year-old Roderick Ferrell, since he moved from Eustis a year before the murders.

The teens were arrested last week in Louisiana, where police say they fled after stealing the Wendorfs' car. — USA Today.

Figure 1.1 Press clipping "Best-selling Vampire game blamed for killing by 5 youths" in *The Straits Times* (1996)

The growth of computers in the 1990s has also spawned a plethora of alarmist editorial like the press clipping “Best-selling Vampire game blamed for killing by 5 youths” in *The Straits Times* (1996) [Figure 1.1]. The logic behind linking the murders to the computer game is unquestioned, and attributed scientific, commonsensical authority. Likewise, the psychological rhetoric explaining the behaviour of the gunman responsible for the Port Arthur killings in 1996 conveniently suggested a correlation between his motivations and violent videos. These are commonsense assumptions that are so familiar in everyday discussions that we take their validity for granted. These are the same assumptions that underlie media policies⁵, programming choices and social attitudes. Wark (1996b) in commentary in *The Australian* states:

so many ‘scientific’ studies come to the same conclusion about media violence - “inconclusive, more studies are needed”. We are talking here about the very things that elude the scientific search for pathology - understanding, meaning, culture. Inferring from the coincidence of a killer who saw a violent video that the one caused the other isn’t rational. (p. 15)

My concern is not with investigating whether such represented violence indeed does beget violence, nor how we can more effectively censor or control the availability of such images. My concern is not with violence at all. By pursuing a debate on whether media violence is affective, or to what extent it does influence people, or who it does influence; locks us into a tussle between the power of media and the power of audiences’ interpretative sophistication.

⁵ Stockbridge (1996) points out that even in the 1990s effects research remains the dominant paradigm in Australia, with censorship ministers continuing to turn to behavioural and medical experts regarding the effects materials such as computer games may have on children and adolescents.

For example, Ang (1985), Radway (1984), Katz & Liebes (1990), and Livingstone (1990) take to task the media-audience-culture relationships in various ways; but the tendency is to set up an opposition between the power of texts and the power of audiences (Livingstone, 1990):

If we see the media or life events as all-powerful creators of meaning, we neglect the role of audiences; if we see people as all-powerful creators of meaning, we neglect the structure of that which people interpret. The important questions concern the interrelation of the two: how do people actively make sense of structured texts; how do texts guide and restrict interpretations. The creation of meaning through the interaction of texts and readers is a struggle, a site of negotiation between *two* semi-powerful sources. (p. 23)

This results in a research paradigm much like Livingstone's own of audience-cum-content analysis. This is problematic as the comparison of audiences' interpretations with the researcher's interpretations creates implicit power relations. Again, the struggle is isolated to a bounded text-audience circuit, abstracting them from their contextual networks. As Frow (1991) points out:

In the absence of realised texts which can be subject to determinate analysis - in the absence of a definite and graspable object - the analyst will inevitably reconstruct such an object . . . [The result of which] is a politically fraught substitution of the voice of a middle-class intellectual for that of the users of popular culture; and it is characteristically in the space of this substitution that the category of the popular is constructed. (p. 60)

This draws critical attention to the research process and its attendant intellectual discourses. The problem is the over simplification of the media-society-culture relationship; the inadequacy of how everyday media use has been theorised.

Media, societies, and cultures, are not discrete entities or monolithic self-contained systems. We cannot cordon off an area of research where we can examine the media moment without these contextual issues seeping in. Ang (1996, p. 4) argues that “studying media audiences is not interesting or meaningful in its own right, but becomes so only when it points towards a broader critical understanding of the peculiarities of contemporary culture”. To look at media in isolation, or the text-audience relation alone, reinforces tendencies to think of a given cultural system in limited or misleading ways. As Bennett (1990, p. 5) proposes, the technological, the economic and the ideological are inextricably intertwined, they traverse a complexity of relations; to the extent where they cannot be fruitfully theorised in isolation. A focus on technology, rather than on the relationships of the inextricably intertwined, displaces critical attention from the relations *in* society to those supposedly *external* to society. This constructs a discourse of media crisis - social malaise by the infection of popular media.

Chapter Two

Methodology: An overview

Discussion in the previous section on audiences and audience research may seem totally irrelevant to the pager. After all, it is quite unlike the television, and its users are not exactly audiences. Yet within communication studies, the individual is predominantly constructed as audience or reader first of all; and then massed as categories of audiences or readers. Our methods *understand* individuals as audiences or readers. How, then, are we to apply this understanding and methodology to individuals identified as pager users? We need to negotiate the relationships between the pager, its users, and the Singaporean context, in relation to communication studies. We need to ask how communication studies explains and understands the pager.

The pager, as far as I have been able to tell, has not been a subject of communication research. Most research around it would be business and consumer oriented (Gillard, 1994):

Unlike TV, measures of telecommunications use do not rate much mention in newspaper columns. Telecommunications companies compile sophisticated data sets measuring actual usage which they can cross reference with demographic information obtained from special surveys or the Census. However, the existence and use of such market information is not publicised because of its commercial sensitivity. (p. 29)

Gillard (1994) outlines a move in the field of telecommunications research (here, she is referring to telephone use) towards a more ethnographic approach, seeking how people define their relation to the telephone and the purposes it serves in their lives. She argues that there is a growing body of work exploring the cultural role of the telephone. Gillard (1994) cites the example where women were found to adopt the cellular telephone as a method of remote mothering: "the cellular phone permits them to exist in their domestic and work worlds simultaneously women are now working 'parallel shifts' rather than what has been described as the 'double shift'" (Rakow & Navarro 1993, p. 153; cited in Gillard, 1994, p. 30). Significantly, this area of research has gained some insight, although this is quite limited, from audience studies. The work of Silverstone and Hirsch (1992) on the uses of information communication technologies (ICTs) in the home forms the basis for one of the projects cited by Gillard (1994). But this continues to be an area that has sustained little interest in terms of an ideologically rooted critical investigation. Unlike study of the press, film or television, there has been limited examination of ICTs in relation to social institutions and cultures. As such, publicly available information on pager users is ratings oriented; meaning that they simply measure who owns a pager.

The purpose of this paper is not to provide a better understanding of pager users to increase sales figures. Appadurai (1986, p. 29) suggests that demand itself “emerges as a function of a variety of social practices and classifications, rather than a mysterious emanation of human needs, a mechanical response to social manipulation (as in one model of the effects of advertising in our own society), or the narrowing down of a universal and voracious desire for objects to whatever happens to be available”.

Therefore, demand for, and the value of, pagers is subject to social definition and control; they are socially regulated and generated impulses rather than artefacts of individual whims or needs. Appadurai (1986, p. 15) uses the term “regimes of value” to focus on the relational and contextual bases of value (and its implications on demand). For Appadurai (1986), that value is not an inherent property of objects but rather a judgement made *about* them by subjects:

the economic object does not have an absolute value as a result of demand for it, but the demand, as the basis of a real or imagined exchange, endows the object with value. (p. 4)

Therefore, following Appadurai’s argument, value is defined and contextualised by cultural and social frameworks. However, these frameworks are contingent. They are negotiated through *regimes* of value varying from situation to situation, from commodity to commodity. And they reveal a politics of value that is at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural and social factors.

The value of, demand for, and consumption/use of, pagers illuminate their social and cultural contexts. What audience research has shown is that the problem is in trying to define and limit that context. In relation to my argument in the previous section, whilst a user/audience related focus is necessary, it is also important to bear in mind that (Morley, 1992):

Much of our theorising about contemporary society - about the practices and cultures of everyday life - is informed less by an understanding of the detailed practices of real people as they go about their daily business than by an abstract theorising that takes for granted, much as we do ourselves in our daily lives, the forces and structures, the conflicts and contradictions, of quotidian reality. (p. 247)

The criticism of audience studies is that it has inadequately theorised everyday media use, leading to oversimplification of the media/technology-society-culture relationship. Although communication studies is not *only* audience studies, this problem underlies much of communication theory. Audience studies is an obvious area where media/technology-audience activity has been extracted from its context. It is also the method that most commonly comes to mind when investigating the relationship between media and audiences. One needs to ask why a line is drawn between media and audiences, and pagers and pager users; where the former is considered the site of the social and the latter, of consumption.

Bricolage and lamination: Looking for a methodology

Trying to construct some sense of methodology for this project is difficult. There is a limited history of research dealing with pagers outside of the commercial context.

Preceding studies and methodologies are virtually non-existent. Furthermore, the pager does not fit easily into communication research methodologies. It defies existing definitions of the media-audience relationship. The pager, by definition, is *not* a media, and its users are *not* audiences nor readers. There is an implicit rejection of the pager because it is categorised as a purely asocial product for consumption. I find cultural studies useful here because:

cultural studies in fact has no distinct methodology, no unique statistical, ethnomethodological, or textual analysis to call its own. Its methodology, ambiguous from the beginning, could best be seen as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic, and self-reflective. (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992, p. 2)

From a cultural studies position, I am able to open up the possibility of looking at the pager in relation to communication theory. It allows for the unruliness of the pager as a subject. Whilst cultural studies is not actually interested in applying *methodologies* as such, it has its antecedents. My approach attempts to apply the appropriate methodologies, and tries to use them self-reflexively. This includes an understanding of the historical traditions of methodologies such as textual analysis (from literary theory); and, if necessary, to depart from or extend upon the theoretical basis of such methods.

Cultural studies distinguishes itself from the humanities and social sciences (while evolving from them) by its commitment to self-reflexivity. In this I follow Nelson et al's (1992, pp. 10-11) view that cultural studies is "constantly writing and rewriting its own history to make sense of itself, constructing and reconstructing itself in response to new challenges, rearticulating itself in new situations, discarding old assumptions and appropriating new positions, [it] is always contextual Cultural studies involves how and why such work is done, not just its content".

To me, the challenge of cultural studies is to look at new "cultural practices" (such as the use of the pager); and to try to develop a way to study and understand them as a part of changing/contingent social relations. Its ideologically rooted stance and almost ad hoc methodology is appealing in the sense that it offers a reflective and flexible critical standpoint. It questions its subject as much as its own tools of research; pushing the boundaries of what is "thinkable" to its limits.

However, one needs to be constantly aware of the power relations that inscribe one's own analyses. Cultural studies itself needs to question its own politics, the biases of its own history and methodologies. It raises the same issues that face communications studies as a discipline, and the wider sphere of knowledge production. Conceptually, cultural studies offers a bridge between theory and material culture in that "the politics of the analysis and the politics of intellectual work are inseparable intellectual work is, by itself, incomplete unless it enters back into the world of cultural and political power and struggle, unless it responds to the challenges of history" (Nelson et al, 1992, p. 6).

Cultural studies acknowledges and addresses contingency. But it should serve, as this paper should, only as an *aspect* of our theorisation. I do not presume to reject all other work outside of the cultural studies tradition. However, a cultural studies perspective offers a constant reminder of the power relations that contextualise our intellectual, cultural and political worlds.

Furthermore, in this paper power is identified as a discursive relation. This needs to be read in terms of Foucault's critical method:

Foucault's technique involves what might be called a kind of lamination: building up citation upon citation, juxtaposing official and marginal discourses, quoting at length, rarely making heavily marked interpretive comments, allowing bits of cited text to carry the work, arranging and collecting historical fragments so that the order and arrangement of them, the technique of their montage perhaps, speaks for itself. (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 21)

By looking at the discursive constructions of youth and technology in the media, academic research, legislation, business/advertising, and journalistic writing; I suggest that these discourses intersect with the promotion of pagers, and pager use, to reveal a terrain of power relations. The ideas of lamination and montage help me to compare and relate discourses of varying levels of legitimacy. Thus, the assumptions made in communication theory are critiqued along with the assumptions of advertising and legislation. In the process, I also examine the implied levels of legitimacy ascribed to different discourses in terms of power relations.

Singaporean youth and pagers are at the interfaces of power relations; at sites of interface between significant “boundary dirt”¹. They potentially redefine and/or reiterate conceptions of youth, space, body and technology; in relation to economic, ideological, and cultural discourses. The problem and task of this project is “to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their points of application and the methods used . . . but instead of taking these as signs of human freedom we will *use them strategically to tell us more about forms of power and how people are caught up in them* [my italics]” (Abu-Loghud, 1990, p. 42). It is an exploration of the possibility that Foucauldian theories of power may contribute to a perspective of society that recognises its inextricably intertwined, knitted together relations.

¹ Leach (1976, pp. 61-2) argues that boundaries become dirty by definition. Earth in the kitchen is dirt; it is matter out of place. The clearer the boundary, the more conscious we are of the dirt that ambiguously gets onto the wrong side of the line; and the harder we try to keep that boundary clean so as to legitimise our category system. See also Chapter 2 “Television and the power of dirt” in Hartley (1992a, pp. 21-42).

Chapter Three

According to Murdock and McCron (1976), our modern images of youth and adolescence were essentially creations of the Victorian middle class. At first it was an ethos of youth confined to the offspring of the middle classes, “in successive decades however, it was increasingly detached from this original social base and generalised into a description of a universal stage of individual maturation, so that by the turn of the century the social norms of the middle class became enshrined as the ‘natural’ attributes of youth *per se*” (Murdock & McCron, 1976, p. 192). This is not to say that youth did not exist before this, but that it was at this time that the ideas of dependence, education (i.e. mental and moral development) and separation were foregrounded as elements of adolescence. In particular, Murdock and McCron (1976, p. 197) cite Parsons’ 1942 suggestion that youth culture was the culture of a generation who consumed without producing; one centred on hedonistic consumption. Parsons argued that confinement in age-specific educational institutions removed them from the productive system, as well as the class relations rooted in that system: “this emphasis on the irrelevance of class inequalities, coupled with stress on consumption and leisure as the pivots of youth consciousness, was destined to dominate the sociology of youth” (Murdock & McCron, 1976, p. 197). These observations of youth subcultures that were promulgated in post-war Britain in the 1940s appear to bear similar arguments to observations of youth in the 1990s!

Teen drinkers: Parental neglect nub of problem?



Youngsters crowding the Boat Quay pubs: Are today's parents spending enough time bringing up their children?

I REFER to Mr Alan John's article "Teen drinkers: Time to end cat-and-mouse game" (ST, Jan 3).

There is no doubt that stiffer penalties and vigorous checks can deter underaged youngsters from patronising night spots.

But this is only a deterrent measure.

Young people can still get older friends to obtain drinks and consume them elsewhere,

such as void decks and parks.

Have we ever studied what has gone wrong — the source of the problem?

I recall my own teenage days, more than 10 years ago, when parents were very strict in disciplining us children.

We had to be home before midnight after an evening outing. We had to inform our parents where we would be going and whom we were go-

ing out with. We were reminded constantly to be thrifty in spending the meagre daily allowance we were given.

We had our parents to guide and teach us to be self-disciplined and to behave properly, to teach us how to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong.

Are today's parents spending sufficient time and effort in bringing up their children?

Are they so preoccupied with their careers that they have neglected their parental role?

How a child behaves will depend on the education he or she receives, and how orderly a society becomes will rely on the behaviour and conduct of its people, who are taught by the preceding generation.

CHANG YONG YEN

Figure 3.1 Press clipping "Teen drinkers" in *The Straits Times* (Chang, 1996)

The previous letter (figure 3.1) taken from the *Straits Times* in 1996 reflects similar concerns with deviancy, the need for education and discipline, and the spending habits of young Singaporeans. This letter responds to a string of *Straits Times* reports and commentary on teenagers frequenting Boat Quay, a night spot particularly popular among upwardly-mobile professionals. Not only were the underaged reported consuming alcohol, but brawls and fights were also said to have occurred. The young were characterised as nuisances marring the pleasure of adult patrons of the area. First of all, Chang's (1996) letter romanticises his own youth: "we had our parents to guide and teach us to be self-disciplined and to behave properly, to teach us how to differentiate between what is right and wrong". He falls back on the familiar cry of moral decay; yearning for the golden years gone by. Secondly, he implies that the appearance of young patrons at Boat Quay is symptomatic of hedonistic consumption and a lack of discipline among youth. He concludes that it remains the responsibility of the family, of education and of society to keep the young in check. This argument reflects the foundations for the development of the school as an instrument of strict discipline, a training for life, in the seventeenth century. According to Aries (1960):

Family and school together removed the child from adult society. The school shut up a childhood which had hitherto been free within an increasingly severe disciplinary system . . . the solicitude of family, Church, moralists and administrators deprived the child of the freedom he had hitherto enjoyed among adults. It inflicted on him the birch, the prison cell - in a word, the punishments usually reserved for convicts from the lowest strata of society. (p. 397)

It was an interest in education, and the rise in religious and moral development teaching parents that they were spiritual guardians, that catalysed the need for the child to be separated from adults and trained for adult life. The specific conception of the progress from childhood, to youth, to adulthood, that we have is socially and culturally constructed. It is linked to the rise of the modern family, and government through the family - particularly the working-class family (Donzelot, 1979, pp. 46-7). The question, then, is not about the *nature* of youth, but rather the *role* of youth in the social and cultural.

I have tried to compare various discourses on youth across a wide spectrum of history, specifically Western history, with a piece of social criticism from present day Singapore to make the point that the “natural” attributes that are assumed of youth are weighed down by concerns of class, education, discipline, and other social relationships. The category “youth” is more ideological and hegemonic than biological; and the concerns we articulate today arguably continue to assert the middle class social norms from which this category was created.

Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts (1976, p. 17) argue that a thread of historical continuity runs through analyses of youth culture formations. They cite Roberts' (1971) description of an Edwardian youth in the classic slum to be just as relevant to youth cultures in post-war Britain. And I would add that those same comments can also be applied (to some extent) to Singaporean youth, Asian youth, or simply youth, in the 1990s. In particular, concern over the relationship between youth and new popular media constantly draws on the recurring assumptions of youthful vulnerability and the anarchic, anti-social forces of Victorian "penny dreadfuls", to "horror comics" of the 1950s, to "video nasties" of the 1980s, to computer games in the 1990s (Buckingham, 1993b, p. 4). Not only do these anxieties have a long history, but they recur across a wide spectrum of political and moral beliefs. They are commonsense assumptions that adults, whether as parents, educators, social workers, or censors, constantly utilise in everyday decisions and arguments. It would be easy to simply explain pager use among youth with such commonsense arguments as: Singaporean youth are aping their American counterparts; the product and advertising seduces their consumerist, fashion conscious desires; they are too young to be discriminating; or it is an effective way for parents to monitor their children's whereabouts. Why do these assumptions sustain such positivity over time and space?

As Buckingham (1993b, p. 4) points out: "to define young people as merely vulnerable and credulous thus represents a forceful legitimization of adult power and control". In looking at the discourses of youth and their relationships with discourses of technology, I am analysing the discourses that intersect and encircle the promotion of pagers, and pager use, in relation to the context of Singapore. However, these discourses are reiterated in other social and cultural contexts as well; the issue of power and control has implications for all societies in one way or another. I am questioning how adult cultures understand youth and position this mass in relation to social mechanisms.

The pager: Business tool, fashion accessory?

In the introduction I pointed out that the pager market seems to be segmented into business person/professional and trendy youth. One category blurs into the other; but a comparison of advertisements shows distinct differences in the way each is constructed.

In the past, pagers were considered as solely the tools of business people, doctors or social workers; professionals characterised as needing to keep in touch to maintain control (refer to figures 3.2, 3.3 & 3.4). The pager purported to enable them to transcend national boundaries, increase efficiency, and monitor information. The Memo Express Skypager (figure 3.2) claims to “help you stay on top of things, even when you’re out of town”. Also note in figure 3.3, the authoritative businessman’s hand. It is positioned as a personal assistant for the purposes of efficient and increased production. Therefore the “pertinent” information it supplies (refer to figure 3.4) encompasses news headlines, stock indexes, weather forecasts and lottery (*sic*) results. Its implied users are constructed as the New Class of intellectuals and technical intelligentsia¹ by utilising discourses of production, business, and adulthood.

¹ By the New Class, I refer to Frow’s (1995, p. 90) definition of intellectuals as “all of those whose work is socially defined as being based upon the possession and exercise of knowledge, whether that knowledge be prestigious or routine, technical or speculative”. A professional-managerial middle class.

Figure 3.2 Advertisement for Memo Express Skypager in *The Straits Times* (1995)

[illegible]

Figure 3.3 Brochure for Motorola Scriptor LX2 pagers (Motorola, n.d.)

**WITH THE MOTOROLA SCRIPTOR LX2,
YOU GET MORE THAN JUST A NUMBER.**



Weighing a mere 72 grams, inclusive of battery, the new Scriptor LX2 from Motorola is one of the smallest and lightest alpha-numeric pagers in town. And because it delivers complete messages, there's no need to call back. So it's an ideal and efficient communication

FEATURES

Stores up to 20 messages

Like a tiny answering machine, the Scriptor LX2 can store up to 20 messages automatically. You can delete a message or lock it in the memory for future reference.

A 2-line, 20-character display screen

The 2-line, 20-character Supertwist dot matrix display makes message reading exceptionally easy. There's also a backlight for use in dim lighting conditions.

4 simple buttons to do everything

The Scriptor LX2 is so simple to use you could probably figure it out even



MOTOROLA
PAGERS



YOU GET AN ENTIRE MESSAGE.



Dimensions (mm): 77 x 51 x 18.2. Weight with battery: 72g. Power supply: One 1.5 Volt AAA-size battery.

without instructions.

A choice of 8 user-selectable alert tones

This pager lets you select the alert tone you like, and change it anytime you want.

tool for people on the go. What's more, it comes with Motorola's seal of quality because it has passed the Accelerated Life Testing—the highest possible standard of quality and operating

reliability ever devised for pagers. So you can rest assured it is highly dependable.

time and date received.

Time display

The Scriptor LX2 also functions as a little alarm clock to remind you of things you have to do.

Memory retention

Messages and pager settings are retained in the memory even when the pager is switched off or during battery change.

Automatic On/Off

If you don't want to be paged after a certain time, you can set it to turn off automatically at that time, and turn on automatically again the next morning.

Vibra-Page Silent Alert

The vibration alert allows you utmost privacy and discretion when you are in a meeting or at a concert.

Message Timestamping

Every message is stamped with the

Telecom Equipment

A member of the Singapore Telecom Group

TELESHOPS: ALEXANDRA TEL: 2701178 • ANG MO KIO TEL: 4558151 •
BEDOK TEL: 4420989 • BENDOMEER TEL: 2955819 • BUKIT BATOK
TEL: 5886708 • CLEMENT TEL: 7734435 • COMCENTRE TEL: 7381538
• HOLLAND TEL: 7744074 • JURONG EAST TEL: 5670003 • MARINA*
TEL: 3342236 • PARKWAY PARADE* TEL: 4473391 • PICKERING
TEL: 5387050 • TAMPINES TEL: 7871971 • TOA PAYOH TEL: 2588992
• WISMA ATRIA* TEL: 7386718 • YISHUN TEL: 7560705
*Also open on Sunday



SGS
TEL: 4558151

INFOPAGE



FREE Information at your fingertips

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As an added bonus, PageLink will provide to all MessagePage customers our useful information broadcast service called **InfoPage** — FREE!

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To receive the free information, your MessagePager would first require a simple technical adjustment. Please contact your pager retail outlet for more details. (Note: some MessagePager models cannot receive or may only be able to receive information on one channel.)

For more information on **InfoPage**, call our friendly customer service team today at 1620.

 **PageLink**
A member of the Singapore Telecom Group

Figure 3.4 Leaflet for InfoPage (PageLink, n.d.)

In contrast, the “younger generation” is presumably more concerned with hit-music charts and entertainment news (figure 3.5). The centre of the youth’s world is positioned as marginal to the adult’s; the implicit frivolity of leisure and entertainment against the vital importance of news. Importance is placed on the pager’s “wearability”; its choice in colours, its flexibility as an accessory. For instance, Motorola’s Bravo Echo comes with six types of accessories “so you can wear it however you want. And wherever on your body you want” [(Motorola, n.d.) refer to figure 3.6]. Pre-eminence is given to wearing the Echo as opposed to its functionality. Its ornamental qualities, which are well suited for the purposes of display are highlighted, referring to the myth² of youth constructed as irreverent, free, consumerist, and exhibitionistic. Similarly in the advertisement for Avont pagers (figure 3.7) models are shown wearing the product as a hairclip, on clothes, around the arm. The sense of display is diametrically opposed to the power and control connoted by the sedate Motorola pager grasped in the businessman’s hand. The Arpeggio pager (figure 3.8) goes to the extent of showing literally only hips wearing an excessive number of pagers in its advertisements.

² I am referring to Barthes’ (1973) use of the term to mean the second-order meaning of the signified: “a myth, for Barthes, is a culture’s way of thinking about something, a way of conceptualising or understanding it” (cited in Fiske, 1990, p.88).

Hit-music charts on pagers

HIT-MUSIC charts, weather forecasts and entertainment news will be available readily to those living in Jakarta — through their pagers.

Information service provider Tomen Corp and Casio Computer have just launched a service in Indonesia, targeted at the younger generation, which transmits entertainment information to pagers.

With this service, information supplied by a local radio station is to be transmitted to Casio-brand pagers four times a day.

Tomen and Casio aim to boost the latter's pager sales in Indonesia by providing the service for free, it said. The two companies are also considering the launch of the same service in the Philippines, reports AFN-Asia.

Figure 3.5 Press clipping "Hit-music charts on pagers" in *The Straits Times* (1996)

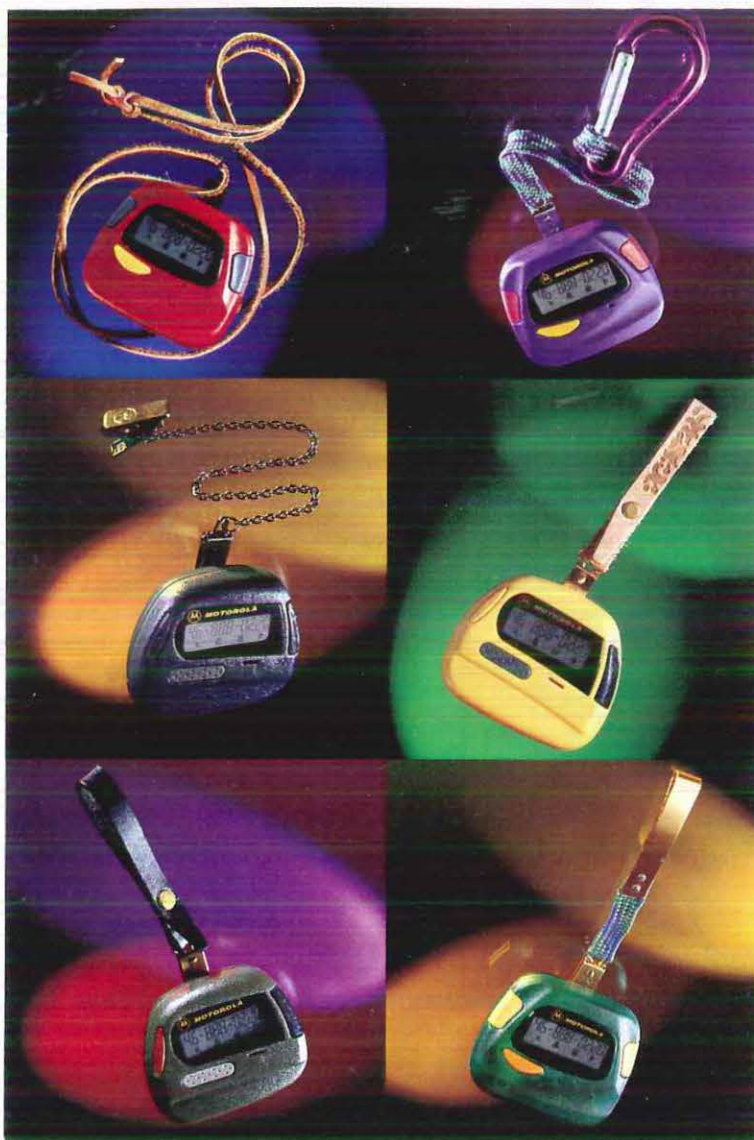


Figure 3.6 Brochure for Motorola Bravo Echo (Motorola, n.d.)

Figure 3.7 Advertisement for Avont AI-898N pagers in *The Straits Times* (1995)

AVONT AI-898N

Yes! With the new AVONT™ AI-898N pager, I can certainly colour my world. I can mix 'n' match from a **dazzling range of faces and cases** to create my own look and I can even choose **my own special beep!**

My new AVONT™ pager reminds me of important appointments, thanks to its **3 alarms** that can each be set to display any of the **10 built-in messages**. When my family or friends page me, there is another set of built-in messages – like "Miss You", "Call Home", "Lunch" which they can use. Now, everybody says that I'm more responsive!

What's more, my AVONT™ AI-898N pager shows me the **time and day** of each page, and I can set it to switch on or off automatically at preset times.

All this, and a **3-year warranty**, for just **\$138** (\$142.14 with GST). Definitely Cool!

Colour your world

TERRIFIC DEALS!

- **FREE** 2 months subscription (worth \$32) if you're between 16 and 20 years old! Valid from October 10 – 24, 1995 only.
- **FREE** AVONT™ velvet pager pouch with every purchase of an AI-898N pager, while stocks last.
- **FREE** Information Services via AVONT™ pagers. Information on weather forecast, STI Index and 4-D draw results.

the new generation's connection

Authorized Distributors • Comel • Cellular Pacific • Omnia Telecommunications

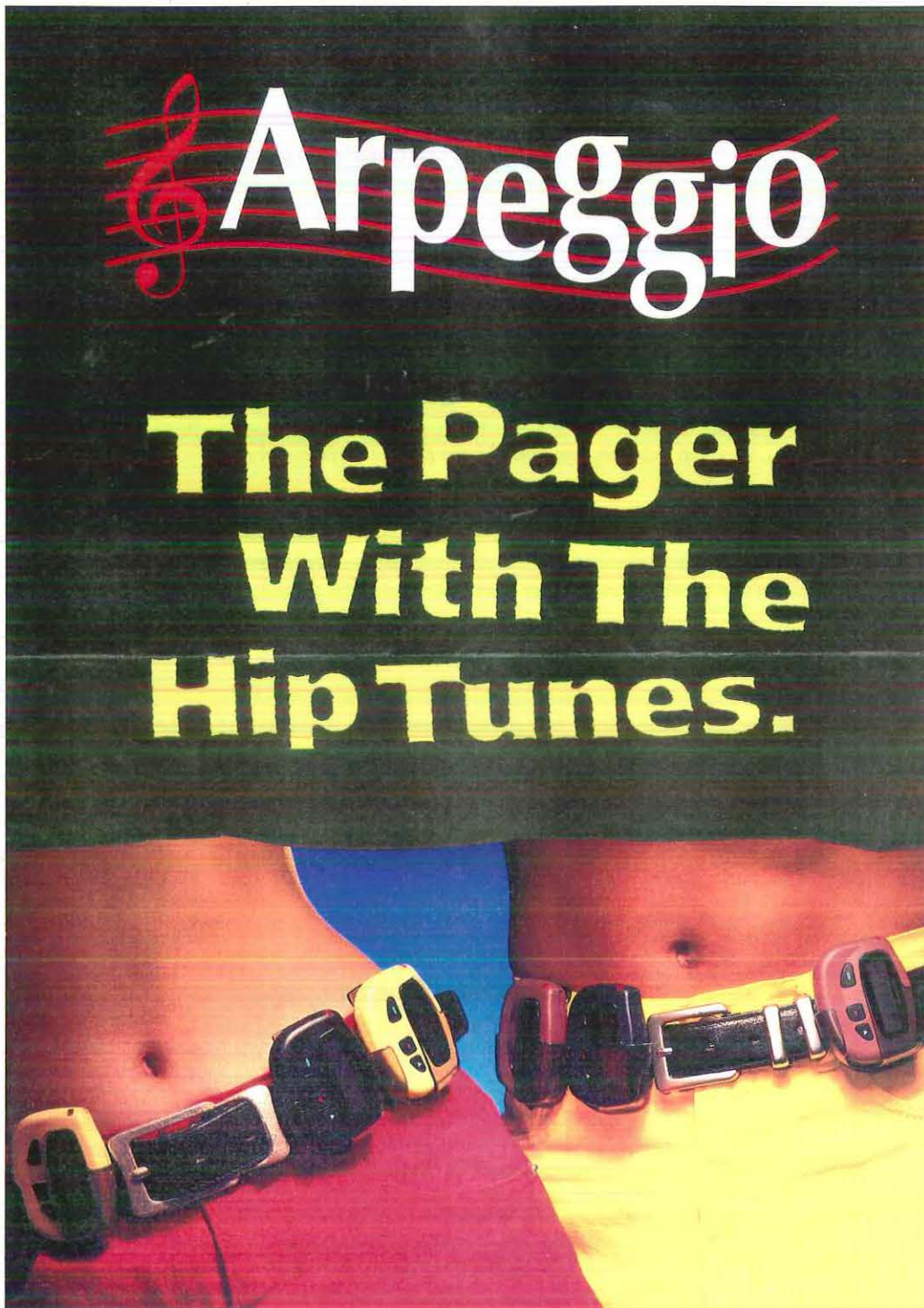


Figure 3.8 Advertisement for Arpeggio pagers (Goldtron, n.d.)

Hebdige (1979) argues that:

by repositioning and recontextualising commodities, by subverting their conventional uses and inventing new ones, the subcultural stylist give the lie to what Althusser has called the 'false obviousness of everyday practice' (Althusser and Balibar, 1968), and opens up the world of objects to new and covertly oppositional readings. (p. 102)

The repositioning and recontextualising of the pager from business tool to stylistic device can be seen as subcultural in a sense. as it appropriates an object from its conventional modes of discourse and juxtaposes it in a "deviant" set of codes and significations. The categories youth and business person are not significant in themselves. Rather, it is the implicit boundary between the two as expressed by the distinct advertising that is of interest. They reveal specific assumptions of the nature and needs of youth, youth being understood as "not an adult business person" characterised as consumers concerned with the look, and with ornamenting the body. The supposedly new and liberating qualities of the pager, though oppositional to the "normality" of its use as a business tool, are conflated with the same sphere of capital production because they are enunciated in the context of advertisements. It is the double bind of advertising appropriating the codes of subculture.

A simple analysis of a few advertisements cannot claim to encompass the discursive complexities around the category youth. Youth are not *only* consumers concerned with fashion and appearances. However, examination of the boundaries constructed by the seemingly innocuous strategy of market segmentation, for a little considered communication technology, draws attention to the complexities and contradictions of what youth means. It also raises the question of *how* youth means.

I am not attempting to unmask the fundamental, biological and developmental nature of youth. Leach (1976) argues that:

when we draw a social distinction between an infant and an adult the boundary is artificial; there is no biological point of discontinuity so we must make one . . . boundaries become dirty by definition and we devote a great deal of effort to keeping them clean, just so that we can preserve confidence in our category system. (p. 62)

Therefore, my concern is not with the essential, biological qualities of youth (if they exist at all), but rather the conceptions of them as categories or boundaries that circulate within the framework of communication studies; as well as within the wider contexts of economic, political, cultural and social arguments.

Why teens need pagers: Youth as consumers

According to Market Behaviour (Singapore), 77 percent of teenagers own pagers to keep in touch with friends; 41 percent for parents to keep track of them; and six percent due to peer influence ("Eye on lifestyle", 1997). The uses of the pager here, distinguishes the teenage pager user from their adult counterparts. The most important reason for owning a pager (to maintain contact with friends) is social and primarily leisure-oriented. The second reason highlights the aspect of dependence and separation between parents and teenagers; the pager provides some level of surveillance potential. The smallest percentage (peer pressure) suggests that a proportion of teenagers are vulnerable to influence and succumb to the need to conform to group norms. The needs of the teenage consumer here are broadly characterised as firstly, consumerist; and secondly, opportunities for supervised freedom. They are in sharp contrast to the importance accrued to adult ownership of pagers. Singaporean sociologist Chua (1996), goes to the extent of dismissing teenage pager use as pretentious (figure 3.9):

The truth is, days may go by without anyone paging someone like him and that, even if he is paged, it is usually for an insignificant reason, unlike the surgeon being summoned to a patient on a matter of life and death.

Beep beep: Look at me, I'm important and needed urgently

Viewpoint

Chua Beng Huat

ALL consumer objects that are carried on the body can become objects of fashion, no matter how functional they are.

Clothes, shoes and watches, which are now treated as quintessential fashion items, undoubtedly had humble beginnings as functional goods.

The newest entrants to this pantheon of functional yet ornamental objects of adornment are the mobile telephone and the ubiquitous, inexpensive, pager.

Elevation of both to ornamental status is noticeable in their design: Each successive generation strives to be more sleek and attractive than its predecessor — industrial goods fused with the design concerns of fashion.

In this ornamentalisation process, the mobile telephone appears to be still rather shy. It remains metallic and matte-black or grey, colours that impart to it a sense of seriousness and formality.

The only other colour marketed here is, of course, gold, a colour of choice among Asia's new rich.

One wonders when it is going to follow in the footsteps of the pager and break out into carnivalesque transparent colours.

It has evolved from a small, square, black box, which had its prominence when clipped to the belt undiminished by its ugliness, into a colourful, crystal-like one that glows in the dark.

As objects of bodily ornamentation, these items are,



of course, displayed conspicuously, both when in use and when dormant.

This is why the beeping sound is so often noticeable, intended to announce to the world that its owner has been summoned urgently.

The beep, signifying the importance of the one summoned, is thus identity self-enhancing.

However, being so publicly summoned is also slightly embarrassing.

This comes from a self-conscious awareness that the functional item is, in fact, concurrently a very public display.

As an item of ornamenta-

tion, the self-conscious user is always aware of the possibility of excess that could transform him into a show-off.

Precisely because of this possible excess, all items of adornment contain the potential of their own subversion, the potential for self-parody.

For me, one of the most memorable instances of this took place at Takashimaya Square.

A group of older teenagers had been lounging on the steps for a while. They formed the core of a group whose composition expanded and shrank according to

who came and left, apparently without prior arrangement.

Every so often, the group would get up and leave the Square, only to return to approximately the same spot a while later.

During one of these short departures, one of the boys collected all the pagers from the group members and hung them randomly, but prominently, all over his clothes.

Pagers of different colours were hanging from his shirt sleeves, breast pockets and the belt-loops of his trousers.

He walked along rather

gingerly with his friends, taking care that none of the pagers fell off.

His excessive adornment and careful gait were calculated to arouse the loud amusement of his friends.

The teenager had turned himself into a public spectacle. Those who saw him could not help but laugh, or, at least, suppress a smile.

He had made a fool of himself. He had accomplished this by showing how ridiculous the wearing of pagers as an ornament had become.

The excess number he wore exposed the underlying pretension of many pager-wearers, a pretension of immediacy and self-worth so great that others cannot wait till you are at home or at the office to get hold of you.

In his self-ridicule, he was redeemed. He showed that he knew the pager was a show.

The truth is, days may go by without anyone paging someone like him and that, even if he is paged, it is usually for an insignificant reason, unlike the surgeon being summoned to a patient on a matter of life and death.

Significantly, this self-ridicule would only be done in public by teenagers whose social honesty about the self often surpasses that of adults.

If there is any doubt about this last observation, try to imagine an adult in his 30s doing the same anywhere in public, let alone in Takashimaya Square.

Chua Beng Huat teaches sociology at the National University of Singapore.

Figure 3.9 Press clipping "Beep beep" in *The Straits Times* (Chua, 1996)

The teenager's pager use is taken as an empty appropriation of an adult technology. The everyday is constructed as insignificant; adult (read legitimate) pager use is meant to be confined to the significant and the vital. Yet it is the everyday, mundane reminders to get that bottle of gin or the sending of birthday greetings that pagers are increasingly used for (refer to figures 3.10, 3.11 & 3.12). Even as this everyday communication is increasingly sold as the added benefit of adult pager ownership; when it comes to teenagers, keeping in touch and looking good is sold as its *most* appealing features. I believe the Minicall advertisements focus more on the everyday aspect of pager communication rather than their users' age. And a close look at the kinds of messages included in the Motorola Jazz advertisement construct an entire lifestyle for its professional adult user, legitimated by his employment. For the employed adult, leisure and purchasing power are constructed as well-earned entitlements. For youth, they are constructed as unnecessary, senseless extravagances.

Stay in touch



MERCURY
MINICall™

**KEEPS YOU IN TOUCH
WITHOUT THE RUNNING COSTS***

- FREE CONNECTION
- NO MONTHLY BILLS
- 100 LETTERS PER TEXT MESSAGE
- NATIONWIDE COVERAGE

**WIDE RANGE OF TEXT AND NUMERIC PRODUCTS
AVAILABLE IN A CHOICE OF COLOURS**

For further information FreeCall 0500 505 505 anytime.

AVAILABLE FROM: ARGOS, CURRYS, DIXONS, JOHN LEWIS PARTNERSHIP, TALKLAND, TANDY, THE LINK, PEOPLES PHONE SHOWROOMS, AND AUTHORISED DEALERS.

*Messages sent to the Text Express and Alpha Express are charged to the caller at 35p economy rate, at 55p at all other times. Calls to all other MiniCall products are charged by the second at 39p a minute economy rate, 49p at all other times. Calls made from payphones, mobile phones and other networks are subject to network availability and prevailing rates of those networks. Uses standard battery lasting up to six weeks.

**AVAILABLE FROM
£59.99 - £99.99**

FEATURED PRODUCT
TEXT EXPRESS RRP £99.99

 **MERCURY**
COMMUNICATIONS

Figure 3.10 Advertisement for Minicall pagers in *Daily Star* (1996)

DAILY STAR, Thursday, July 4, 1996

Stay in touch



MERCURYTM MINICall

KEEPS YOU IN TOUCH
WITHOUT THE RUNNING COSTS*

- FREE CONNECTION
- NO MONTHLY BILLS
- 100 LETTERS PER TEXT MESSAGE
- NATIONWIDE COVERAGE

WIDE RANGE OF TEXT AND NUMERIC PRODUCTS
AVAILABLE IN A CHOICE OF COLOURS

For further information FreeCall 0500 505 505 anytime.

AVAILABLE FROM: ARGOS, CURRYS, DIXONS, JOHN LEWIS PARTNERSHIP, TALKLAND, TANDY, THE LINK, PEOPLES PHONE SHOWROOMS, AND AUTHORISED DEALERS.

*Messages sent to the Text Express and Alpha Express are charged to the caller at 35p economy rate, at 55p at all other times. Calls to all other Minicall products are charged by the second at 35p a minute economy rate, 45p at all other times. Calls made from payphones, mobile phones and other networks are subject to network availability and prevailing rates of those networks. Uses standard battery lasting up to six weeks.

AVAILABLE FROM
£59.99 - £99.99

FEATURED PRODUCT
TEXT EXPRESS RRP £99.99

MERCURY
COMMUNICATIONS

Figure 3.11 Advertisement for Minicall pagers in *Daily Star* (1996)

Figure 3.12 Advertisement for MemoJazz pagers in *The Straits Times* (1997)



Actual size

Introducing **MemoJazz™**, the new **FLEX™** pager from Motorola, that lets you know what's going down right away. Not half a lifetime later. It can store up to 20 messages. Motorola MemoJazz™. Motorola's smallest, smartest pager.



© Motorola, FLEX, FLEX logo, MemoJazz and "What you never thought possible" are registered trademarks of Motorola, Inc. ©1997 Motorola, Inc.



What you never thought possible.™

Authorised Distributors: Amcell. 911 Bukit Timah Road, Singapore 589622. Tel: 4601712. Telepage. 2 Kallang Pudding Road, #08-10 Mactech Industrial Bldg, Singapore 349307. Tel: 7486608. Teleshop. 1 Serangoon North Avenue 5, Singapore 554915. Tel: 4818181. The Wywy Shop. Wywy Industrial Bldg, 12 Hoy Fatt Road, Singapore 159506. Tel: 4721388.

The youth consumer has attained such status that youth consultants, who claim to know what youth want, can confidently proclaim that:

people under 25 feel disenfranchised by politics, but empowered by consumer choice. They are more sussed, more ad literate, marketing literate, they know more about brands, they have more information. Today's teens are well versed in participating in the commercial world. Probably their only area of power is as a consumer (Ratcliff in Benson & Armstrong, 1994, p. 56).

A specific profile of youth emerges, primarily preoccupied with consumption as opposed to production, more powerless than powerful; and seeking freedom and individuality through the acquisition of objects. A re-examination of the advertisements in the previous section shows a broad segmentation of the pager market into adult productive persons and non-adult consumerist persons; the former utilising the pager for maintaining business relations, the latter for familial and social relations. Following this marketing rationale, youth are distinguished from the chaos of the potential marketplace. Yet this rationale is far from new (Murdock & McCron, 1976):

The well publicised rise of the 'youth culture' rooted in the leisure styles sponsored by the burgeoning youth-oriented entertainment industry epitomised this shift perfectly post war youth, the inheritors of affluence, therefore appeared as the vanguard of the coming 'society of leisure', in whose wake marched the 'new' working class with their television sets and bottles of Beaujolais. (p. 197)

Like post war British youth of the 1940s, Singaporean youth of the 1990s, along with their counterparts across the world, are fuelling a consumer revolution with “youth culture” as its *raison d’être*, or so the marketers would have it: “aggressive global marketing and modern telecommunications has meant that 200 million teenagers from Europe, Latin America and the Pacific Rim are snapping up the same Levi’s jeans and Nike trainers as their American counterparts” (Tan, 1994, p. 18). The idea of youth as “inheritors of affluence” is perhaps particularly resonant in the growing economies of the world as:

harried couples busy earning their double incomes are more than happy to assuage their guilt by spending in dollars what they can’t spare in hours they try to compensate by splashing out on expensive gifts or treats for their children. (Tan, 1994, p. 19)

Only instead of television sets and bottles of Beaujolais, we are more likely to think in terms of computers and cappuccinos.

Whilst teenage consumers are seen as a lucrative market, they also tend to be characterised as reckless spenders (see figure 3.13). Implicit in the marketer’s dream is the teenager’s status as apprentice adult; meaning that the assumption is that they are incapable of regulating their spending and are easily seduced by advertising, fashion trends and brand consciousness. The headline “Teens give in to ‘buy, buy, buy’ temptations” leaves nothing to the imagination. This is particularly true of the commentary on youth in Singapore and other parts of Asia. A recent article in *Asia Magazine* (“Icons of our time”, 1996) describes Asian youths’ tastes in fashion as:

A telling statement, perhaps, that haute couture in Asia is more a mass culture, cultivated by glossy advertising and glamorous window displays as opposed to an appreciation of cutting-edge innovation. (p. 10)

Like the pager-toting, mobile phone-using Cher (Alicia Silverstone) in the 1995 movie "Clueless" (figure 3.14), or the designer Walkman-wearing young woman in the Sony advertisement (figure 3.15), the appeal is to the imagined superficiality of teenage needs. Notice that in both advertisements the focal young woman wears red, signifying impetuosity, passion; generally "natural", almost animalistic, qualities. Contrast this to the woman in figure 3.16. Though still relatively young, she is not categorically a youth. Her conservative suit, confident eye contact and challenging "Who say's I'm hard to get?" suggests a more restrained, schooled (if you like, civilised) posture. Taken to the extreme, the binary popular versus high culture, youth versus adult culture can be constructed: where youth are taken as inauthentic and lacking in taste. This can be likened to the elitist approaches of the "culture and civilisation" tradition (Turner, 1990, pp. 42-3) led by Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis. Like the undiscerning consumers of mass culture, our youth need to be cultivated and saved.

Teens give in to 'buy, buy, buy' temptations

EIGHTEEN-year-old Eddie Chng never thought he would grow up to be a shoe salesman one day.

Then again, the polytechnic student does not intend to stay in this line of work for long. Like many teenagers his age, his weekend job is just a way of earning extra cash to support his lifestyle, one he considers "a little extravagant".

His monthly salary of \$400 and an allowance of \$300 from his parents pay for his eat-out sessions at fast-food joints and food courts, going to the movies and playing arcade games every weekend. By the end of the month, he usually has "very little left", meaning "either no money or about \$100".

"Yes, I think I spend too much, but I'm used to earning a lot, so I might as well spend because there's nothing for me to save for," he says with a grin.

He adds that, at least, he does not buy branded outfits.

Chng, then, is not one of those extravagant teenagers, dressed in Versace or Dolce & Gabbana, frequenting expensive nightspots — the stereotype that scandalises older Singaporeans.

And according to a recent survey, Teenagers Lifestyle and Expenditure 1995, Chng's more moderate spending habits are probably more typical of the majority of Singaporean teenagers today.

Pragmatic about clothes

SAYS sociologist Dr Thomas Tan of Market Behaviour: "While there is a small group which favours branded goods, the majority are quite normal teenagers.

"What we found was that teenagers are generally a level-headed, pragmatic group, knowing what constitutes quality and value for money."

The findings were based on face-to-face interviews with 600 teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 conducted from June to August last year. Teenagers in this age group make up 22,412, or 7 per cent of the three million population here.

From the survey, teens do indeed appear to be quite pragmatic when it comes to spending their time and money.

The three most popular leisure activities among teenagers were watching television (87 per cent), listening to the radio (77.4 per cent) and listening to records/cassette tapes/compact discs (74.3 per cent).

The top three items that they spent their money on were casual clothes (86.9 per cent), stationery (65.7 per cent) and records/tapes/CDs (61.7 per cent).

And while designer clothes were at the top of the list of items teenagers were saving up for, the brand that both sexes spent most on was the moderately-priced Giordano casualwear.

Some 36.9 per cent of those interviewed said they bought clothes from Giordano, while Guess? (15.7 per cent) and Levi's (8.6 per cent) were the other preferred labels to sport.

At least one-third of the respondents said they purchased casual clothes at least once a month, spending an average of \$52 per item.

Overall, the teens interviewed said they spent an average of 32 per cent of their allowance on food, 16 per cent on entertainment, 15 per cent on shopping and 12 per cent on public transport.

Only one out of five said he visited discos or karaoke lounges regularly. These party-animals said they went out three times a month. The others stayed away from such places.

Sociologist Dr Chua Beng Huat says: "There is a common view that teenagers are financially irresponsible, but this survey proves that all the hype of them being big spenders, especially on designer clothes, is merely hype."

Spending habits

AS LEVEL-HEADED as they might appear to be, teenagers themselves do admit that while they might not splurge on designer goods, they do find other ways to burn a hole in their pockets.

The majority of the 30 teenagers that Life! spoke to felt that they did tend to spend recklessly and admitted to feeling guilty about their spending habits.

Although she knows she should be saving up for her polytechnic education, 17-year-old Evelyn Lim says she spends most of her \$700 salary as a temporary clerk on things she does not really need.

"It's difficult for me to save but my money disappears very fast because I like to eat out, buy compact discs and clothes and bags from Esprit, Guess? and D & G," she says.

"So sometimes, I try to make myself feel better by spending some of my salary on my parents by taking them out to Ponderosa for a treat."

Still, many find ways to justify their spending habits.

"There are so many temptations around so it's quite natural to want to spend money," says student Lu Wan Shih, 15.

Her classmate Catherine Yeo, 16, says quite matter-of-factly: "I like to



spend and I can't do anything about it.

"It's like a voice in my head telling me 'you must buy ... you must buy'."

Many Singaporean teenagers are lucky in that most parents seem on hand to give them extra money when they ask. But about 4 per cent in the survey said they had small "loans", mostly from friends, then family and employers.

According to the survey, the average amount of weekly pocket money received was about \$44.

The haves and the have-nots

RATHER than rely on parents, or loans, many teens take on part-time work to earn extra cash.

In a 1994 Labour Force Survey, 15- to 19-year-olds made up 7.8 per cent of the 45,700 part-time workers in Singapore.

The Market Behaviour survey found that 49 per cent of teenagers did part-time work during school holidays, while only 17 per cent did so during term time.

Those who worked during school holidays earned an average of \$900, while those who worked during the school term made an average of about \$1,103.

Dr Prem Shamdasani, a senior lecturer on retail management at the National University of Singapore, categorises teenagers who do part-time work as "the have-nots".

According to him, 50 per cent of Sin-

gaporean teens belong to this group, while 30 per cent belong to what he calls, "the haves".

While "the haves" have rich parents who can support their extravagant lifestyles, the "have-nots" are the ones who have to work to buy their own clothes and other luxuries.

"These are the smart shoppers because while they are spending, they are also working hard for their money," he says.

According to him, middle-of-the-road brands like Guess? and Pepe, capture the broader teen segment of "have-nots", because they are branded and also affordable.

While 40 per cent of those surveyed were saving up to buy designer clothes, computer systems and a car, 60 per

cent of the teenagers said they were not saving up towards a particular purchase.

"There is nothing that we can even begin to save for, like a car, because everything is too expensive and we don't get much allowance," says student Marcus Tang, 17, who receives a monthly allowance of \$500. "So whatever money I get, I spend."

And while designer clothes may be at the top of the savings agenda for 21 per cent of the teens in the survey, most said they cost too much to save up for and were not practical.

The reason why many teens wear designer clothes is, as 17-year-old Michael Tang says, that they "boost their self esteem, and also so that people will envy them", even if the price tags are way out of their league.

Although she now wears Future State clothes by designer Juit Leng, Stephanie Teo, 16, says that she has spent as much as \$4,000 in the past on designer clothes and accessories by Moschino, D & G and MCM. Her parents, who run their own construction business, paid for her expensive wardrobe.

But a previous holiday job as a sales promoter made her realise that money is not easy to come by.

"I work one whole month, and get so little, and then I spend all on just one pair of \$300 jeans ... it really gives me heart pain." She now helps out at her parents' office as a means of paying them back and has started saving for university.

Parents who give the money also complain about their children's overspending, it seems.

"When my parents complain, which is quite often, I just keep quiet," says student Goh Kiah Ling, 15. "But I feel that life has changed from when they were young and things are much more expensive now so you can't help but to spend money."

Most of her \$100 monthly allowance is spent on clothes, stationery and teddy bears.

Mrs Lynda Chong, section head of retail management at Temasek Polytechnic, agrees.

"The fact that most of them have part-time jobs and a pager shows that they are on the go and enjoying a very sociable life," she says.

"Spending is part of their lifestyle and I think that if adults didn't have as many responsibilities, like cars, house and kids, they too would probably be spending on the same things too."

Figure 3.13 Press clipping "Teens give in to 'buy, buy, buy' temptations" from *The*

Straits Times (1996)

Sex. Clothes. Popularity.
Is There A Problem
Here?

And
the movie
with attitude
comes with
a bitchin'
soundtrack!

featuring new music from

- Cracker • Counting Crows
- World Party •
- Luscious Jackson •
- Radiohead • Coolio •
- Beastie Boys •
- Mighty Mighty Bosstones •
- Jill Sobule •
- Lightning Seeds •
- Velocity Girl •
- Smoking Popes •
- Supergrass •
- The Muffs •

Available now
through
EMI Music

Clueless

PARAMOUNT PICTURES PRESENTS A FILM BY LAURENCE WOLFGASTEN "CLUELESS" CASTING BY JANE ROSS COSTUME DESIGNER JANE ROSS MUSIC BY JANE ROSS EDITOR JANE ROSS PRODUCTION DESIGNER JANE ROSS EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JANE ROSS PRODUCED BY JANE ROSS WRITTEN BY JANE ROSS DIRECTED BY JANE ROSS

UNITED INTERNATIONAL PICTURES

Opens Brisbane September 14, everywhere else September 21... or whatever!

Figure 3.14 Advertisement for "Clueless" in *Cosmopolitan* (1995)

SONY

YPPY

wear your music out

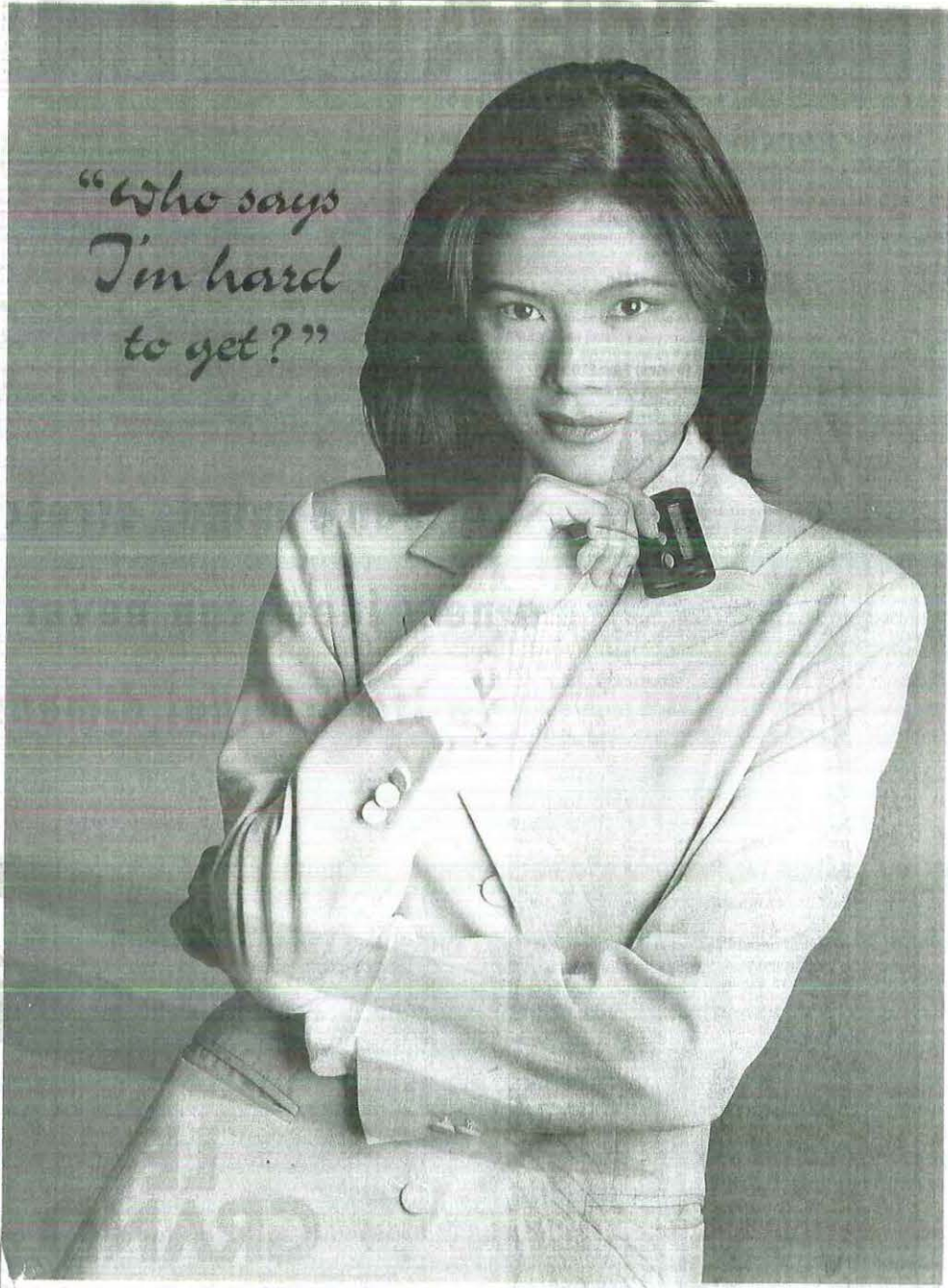
The latest fashion accessory rage from Sony. YPPY is THE designer Walkman you've gotta have. Change it to suit your style - from streetwear to knock'em dead! These are strictly limited editions. Don't miss out!

Available at Isetan Scotts 3rd floor Sony counter and Isetan Orchard Basement 1

Spring in your step
the music in your soul

Sony Singapore Pte Ltd 691, Cornermeuse Drive #03-03 New Pk Technocentre Singapore 149598. Sony India (P) Ltd. 743 1151. Customer Information Centre, Tel. 473 8500.

Figure 3.15 Advertisement for Sony YPPY Walkman in *EightDays* (1997)



*"Who says
I'm hard
to get?"*

If you're thinking of buying a pager, there's never been a better time. That's because from now till 29 February, you'll enjoy 2 months' free subscription in our Ladies' Paging Promotion. What's more, it's available at all pager dealers for any numeric pager model. But remember, this offer is only for ladies.

With a pager, you're only hard to get if you choose so.



Figure 3.16 PageLink advertisement in *The Straits Times* (1996)

Chapter Four

Whilst the idea of culture as only high culture - high art, great literature - may be intellectually *passé* in the fields of communication studies or cultural studies, the idea of culture as the active cultivation of the mind to discriminate and criticise (therefore placing relative value between for example literature and popular fiction) continues to be the basis of social arguments and policies. The Leavisite conception of pedagogy, where “English Literature can be transformed into a vital resource in the struggle to free the minds of the young from the pernicious influence of both popular fiction and commercial advertising” (Milner, 1991, p. 31) continues to be the cornerstone of the assumption that youth need to be watched over, cultivated and educated against negative influences.

In this chapter, I suggest that the segmentation of a youth pager market; the marketing rationalisation of the youth-technology relationship; and the adoption of, and demand for, the pager among youth in Singapore; link with discourses of deviancy and lack of education/culture. Seen in the context of Asia, the categorisation of youth as delinquents bears overt concerns over Asian cultural identity. By raising the issue of culture and identity, I want to make the point that the youth-pager relationship does not exist in bounded isolation; nor does it simply exist in relation to *a* culture.

In trying to study the pager as a social artefact, a network of discourses, I hope to raise consciousness of the *terrain* of power that contextualises our processes of understanding; their *integration* with cultural structures, as the negotiation of meaning *within* and *between* cultures. Meaning does not lie in the object itself, nor in the text, nor in the sign; it is in the interaction of multiple discourses and systems¹. Therefore when I speak of culture, it is far more complex than simply a way of life that occurs within the geographical boundaries of Singapore; nor is it a monolithic, prescribed set of rules (Williams, 1989):

a culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people, and offered individual meanings, the product of a man's whole committed personal and social experience. It is stupid and arrogant to suppose that any of these meanings can in any way be prescribed; they are made by living, made and remade, in ways we cannot know in advance. (p. 8)

It is not solely a matter of society affecting man nor man affecting society. Cultures are relational and are difficult to confine; they are modified by, as much as they modify, the elements they connect. Until we can transcend the notion of bounded texts, individuals and societies or cultures, we can only continue to spin ourselves into an unseeing web.

¹ See Williams (1981) *Culture*, Chapter 8: Organisation.

Asian youth

Asian youth, in particular, are even more susceptible to the discourses of moral and social crises that plague the condition of adolescence. Figures 4.1 and 4.3 are press clippings on the Malaysian government's interest in "the trend of Malaysian youth aping the punk culture of the West" ("Punks and skinheads", 1997). Asian youth are positioned as vulnerable to the characteristically negative influences of the West. In the first instance, both "deviants" interviewed were specifically identified as students studying in Australia. Where there already exists a discourse of crisis perceived as Western culture encroaching upon "good Asian values" (see figure 4.2), youth are positioned as the weakest link in the fight against Western decadence. In "Danger in the airways" (1995) Malaysian Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat utilises many of the discourses of media crisis used in Asia to rationalise control over growing information flow. Nations like Malaysia and Singapore have used the media imperialist argument to legitimise their discourses of Asianness. The Malaysian minister links "the moral decay of our youth" directly to the content of media texts as a self-evident truth; joining the regional war against violence, horror, sex, and counter-culture. The need to discipline impressionable young Malaysians not only legitimises the policing of youth, but the policing of the media as well. As shown in the subsequent article "Students with punk hairstyles face expulsion" (1997) [figure 4.3], the family institution and its values are also drawn in to combat this moral decay of youth.

'We are not doing anything wrong. We are just different.'

Punks and skinheads still out in force in downtown KL

By Brendan Pereira
in Kuala Lumpur

THEY are under the scrutiny of the authorities, but the punks and skinheads of Kuala Lumpur are unfazed.

They continued hanging out in shopping malls in Damansara and the city centre over the weekend. A spokesman for a discotheque in Damansara which imposes a cover charge of M\$17 (S\$9.70) and plays only punk music said yesterday that it had a packed house on Saturday night.

A group of 20 youths with greased-up hair sat around in the atrium of Lot 10, a shopping centre along Jalan Bukit Bintang on Saturday evening.

A 21-year-old, sporting red-and-green hair, said: "Now we will be treated as outcasts. That is the problem in Malaysia. People are labelled without having a chance to defend themselves."

"We are not doing anything wrong. We are just different."

Only wanting to be known as Ali, a business student in Australia, he said that he and his friends expected to be stopped and checked by police more often, now that the Government had taken an interest in the trend of Malaysian youth apeing the punk culture of the West.

Now we will be treated as outcasts. That is the problem in Malaysia. People are labelled without having a chance to defend themselves.'

— A 21-year-old with red and green hair.

Last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad slammed these youths for copying this culture, saying that he could not understand why they would want to gel their hair and look stupid. Young Malaysians, he said, should have discipline and not ape the West blindly.

Following his statement, a number of politicians also voiced their concern over the trend. Umno Youth chief Datuk Zahid Hamidi for instance, called on the police to pick up those who frequented discos and send them for urine tests.

A check showed that most of the punks come from middle-income families and are studying or

have studied abroad. They spend between M\$30 and M\$50 at the hairdressers to get their hair to stick up straight. Resembling cones, these hairstyles keep for two days.

Skinheads, on the other hand, are bald.

But both punks and skinheads don leather jackets, baggy trousers and wear earrings or nose rings.

Adnan, 21, also a student in Australia, says that he and his friends gather at shopping centres to discuss music and other developments in the punk world.

"We do not like anything that is normal. That is why we are like this," he said, pointing to his friends at Lot 10.

He said most of the punks hailed from Klang Valley. However, the trend was catching on in Johor and Penang. On weekends, those from outside KL would make the trip to the city to meet their friends.

While the skinheads and punks insist that they are all for clean fun, the authorities are not convinced.

Most of these youth consume alcohol freely. A number are also drug addicts. In a matter of time, the drug problem and criminal activities among this group will get out of control, say the police. Fights at discos frequented by the skinheads are also common.

REPORTS



SITI ROHANA
KOID

MALAYSIA: POLITICS AND SHOWBIZ

Danger in the airwaves

It will be open skies in Malaysia next year when it lifts an age-old ban on private satellite dishes. But rule out an open field for sex and violence. Malaysia's Information Minister explains why in an exclusive interview

NO to:

- Violence
- Horror
- Sex
- Counter-culture

YES to:

- Local productions
- Programmes promoting Bahasa Malaysia



Picture/ CHOO
CHWEE HUA

MALAYSIAN Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat is disenchanted.

Showbusiness bigshots are taking liberties with what they show, and some artistes are behaving badly.

"As a result, we see a moral decay of our youth," he said in a no-holds-barred interview at his penthouse office in Angkasapuri in Kuala Lumpur last month.

"Society is beginning to lose sight of our traditional norms and values.

"This won't do.

"We have to retain our identity. And our identity is reflected in our culture."

Early this year, he issued a No-VHSC policy — no violence, horror, sex, counter-culture — on anything seen as harmful to Malaysia's political, social and religious values.

The No-VHSC policy will apply to satellite TV (see report at right).

The minister said: "We cannot allow total freedom on entertainment.

"There has to be some control somewhere.

"Otherwise, there will come a time when the situation's uncontrollable, dangerous even.

"Some may say we are denying their rights.

"But by showing too much violence, we're creating a violent society.

"If we promote freedom in sex, the spread of Aids is the result.

"I know some movies resort to violence to show violence is bad. If the message is crime does not pay, how do you convince viewers if you don't show violence?

"I agree — but to me, gory scenes are out.

"As for provocative scenes, if kissing is not allowed at all, our censors would have a difficult time."

He said controls would be relaxed later

TV SHOWS RAINING FROM THE SKY

Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said the ban on private satellite dishes was about to go.

"By next year, some Malaysians will have a choice of more than 30 TV channels, including five cable channels and four terrestrial channels," he said.

The government will still control what is to be shown. All foreign channels beaming to Malaysia will be handled by a single government-monitored satellite. Next April, Malaysia's first communications satellite, Measat-1, will begin transmitting to households that have satellite dishes.

Launched by French-based Arianespace this month, Measat-1 will be the sole transmitter for the whole of Malaysia.

It is owned by a private communications company, Binariang.

"Its programmes need not go through the censorship board, but Binariang is aware of the guidelines," the minister said.

when there was a more discerning audience, adding: "Eventually, we want to develop a kind of self-defence mechanism," he said.

"Whatever's good, we accept, but the negative values, we have to reject."

He cited Singapore, Japan and South Korea as good examples of Asian countries that have managed to achieve a balance between economic and cultural progress.

"Like other countries in Asia, we are developing well, there's progress and prosperity. At the same time, we are able to maintain a strong and stable government," he said.

"But this can be jeopardised unless we protect and retain our good Asian values."

Prime-time lockout

NEXT month, a rating system and viewers' guide will be implemented to keep sex and violence out of prime-time TV.

"Some broadcasters just lump programmes with VHSC elements, although not extreme, in the prime-time slots. Children, adults and elders can all watch," Datuk Mohamed said.

"This is harmful."

There will be two ratings: "U" for umum (general) and "18" for adult viewing.

"U" programmes, without violence, horror, sex or counter-counter elements, will be shown from 7.30 pm to 10 pm. "18" shows with one or more of these elements, though not extreme, will be shown after 10 pm.

The minister said: "The rule that requires all programmes to be screened by our censorship board stays. Movies will remain under the purview of the Home Affairs Ministry. Soon, we'll require the same rating for cinemas, video and laser discs."

"Some may accuse us of not being democratic, that we're denying them of their rights. We're protecting the general public. This is not a question of politics, but nation-building."

— Malaysian Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat (above).

MAKE GUIDELINES CLEARER, SAY ARTISTES / IN SHOWTIME TOMORROW

Box-in-DAY

Students with punk hairstyles face expulsion

PETALING JAYA — Students with punk hairstyles will not be allowed to remain in school, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said on Monday.

He said Director-General of Education Tan Sri Dr Wan Zahid Mohd Nordin had been directed to investigate the trend, which is said to be spreading among schoolchildren.

Students sporting outlandish hairstyles would be asked to change them if they wished to continue with their studies, he added.

"We will look out for the Mohican or Trojan look ... such hairstyles are out," he said in an interview over TV3's Malaysia Hari Ini programme which was reported by The Star.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last week spoke out against punk culture and other negative Western trends adopted by youths.

His comments followed reports that youths from Malay middle-income families were joining punk and skinhead groups.

"Where is the beauty in putting glue on beautiful hair?" he asked.

Utusan Malaysia said in a special report that there were several such groups in the

'Family can help control situation'

capital, but did not give figures.

Datuk Najib said that it was not fair to point the finger at his ministry or the government alone for this problem. "Let us instead examine the strength of our

family institution and its values.

"If parents take an interest in their children's activities and lifestyle, I am sure we can keep things under control," he said.

He added that even the United States and Britain were attempting to reinforce the family unit.

On the single-session system to be introduced on a trial basis in June among selected schools, Datuk Najib said the extended school hours would also incorporate extra-curricular activities, sports and religious classes.

He said his ministry would implement a flexi-timetable for the teachers involved.

He added that teachers would have to put in 5½ hours of teaching daily.

He also said his ministry planned to replace wooden school chairs and tables with plastic ones, adding that the supply of furniture to schools was contracted to a firm under Permodalan Nasional Bhd.

Figure 4.3 Press clipping "Students with punk hairstyles face expulsion" in *The Straits*

Times (1997)

The Asian teenager's "seeming capitulation to Western culture" (Lee, 1995, p. 11) is a constant worry of Asian adults. Today's generation of Asian youth are considered one of the first to fully experience the double exposure of East and West. Read in relation to Yao's (1994) argument that the ambivalence of Southeast Asian attitudes to the West is expressive of issues about culture and cultural identity (in particular the making of the West as Other); then one can see how protection and disciplining of Asian youth easily corroborates broader concerns of Western encroachment. Youth, in this context becomes the site of discursive contention between East and West; a method of asserting what is essentially East by identifying itself as non-West (Yao, 1994):

The Asian discourse of mass media is one of the attempts to resist the impact of Westernisation on the social, cultural and political life in the non-West. Our perception of the West may be a mere product of our imagination, it is no less real in so far that it helps us to formulate an understanding of the world, and to build a foundation to resist the forces of Westernisation . . . by transforming the stranger into an enemy, we can at least remake the West as a space in which we find sanctuary from our uncertainties. (p. 48)

Youth consumerism, youth fashion is coded as Asian youth having fallen prey to Western decadence. Once again, such discursively deviant youth are identified by the clothes they wear and the objects they carry about themselves. Similarly, in a survey conducted by the Singapore Council of Social Service (SCSS) in 1990, trendy youth were identified by:

their garish and quite often outlandish attire. Some were clearly "punkish" in appearance with coloured hairdos and costume jewelleryes [*sic*]. Others are garbed in fashionable outfits and less conspicuous. (p. 17)

These youth were categorised as vulnerable to negative social influences and petty crime as they spent their time hanging around street corners, in fast-food restaurants, in shopping centres or about the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the SCSS (1990) claimed that:

less than a decade ago, most wayward teenagers committed nothing more serious than stealing bicycles, petty theft and shoplifting. Now children as young as eight are being arrested for trying to set fires, sex crimes, vandalism, extortion, and even murder. (p. 2)

Based on this scandalous argument, expressions of youth behaviour such as punk rock cultures, motorcycle gangs, and large gatherings of young people dressed in “outlandish attire” in shopping complexes, were presumed to be cause for concern and studies were established. Whilst within the binaries of East and West, the appropriation of Western youth sub-cultures may be considered an erosion of Asian values; the overarching values that legitimise the surveillance, categorisation and disciplining of youth are not themselves distinctly Asian. As long ago as 1960 Aries identified these values in a European context:

The new society, on the contrary, provided each way of life with a confined space in which it was understood that the dominant features should be respected, and that each person had to resemble a conventional model, an ideal type, and never depart from it under pain of excommunication.

The concept of the family, the concept of class, and perhaps elsewhere the concept of race, appear as manifestations of the same intolerance towards variety, the same insistence on uniformity. (p. 399)

The modern Asian family may be more “Western” than we care to admit. However, this does not assume a uni-directional power that necessarily produces conformity or regularity; conversely, in a system of controls that aspires for uniformity, deviance is ever more highlighted. Foucault (1977) suggests that:

as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualised . . . in a system of discipline, the child is more individualised than the adult . . . the madman and the delinquent more than the normal and the non-delinquent. (p. 193)

The systems of power set to define a stable Asianness, Malaysianness, Singaporeanness, society, or culture; necessarily construct a discursive Other, an identifiable “not us”, against which the desired “normality” may be given meaning and legitimacy.

Similarly, the deviancy juxtaposed upon Asian youth articulates the ambivalence of their respective adult cultures towards modernity. The intrication of youth into this technology of power is an attempt to sieve through Western technical knowledge as a positive marker of modernity; yet reducing Western values - cultural knowledge - to characteristically negative, decadent and erosive influences of sex, violence, and delinquency. Asian cultures negotiate the contradiction between accepting Western capital, technology and expertise, whilst seeking to maintain a clearly Asian identity, by constructing the West as an evil, moral Other. Youth, being the weakest link in this fight against Western “decadence”, serve as the body from which these fears are exorcised.

It is necessary to take this dichotomy of East and West into consideration in order to understand the scope of discursive potential the category of youth has in this context. The tussle of meaning between the commercial conceptions of youth and the dominantly ideological conceptions of youth may appear contradictory; and even totally unrelated. What do issues of culture and cultural identity have to do with pagers? This network of discourses *do* intersect to take form as a condition of reality for the statements made about youth and about pagers; the *a priori* of a history of things already said².

² Foucault (1972) defines this *a priori* as the group of rules that characterise a discursive practice: these rules are not imposed from the outside on the elements that they relate together; they are caught up in the very things that they connect. (p.127)

Youth as delinquents

Whilst governments and social agencies take the outward appearance of youth as a true guide to their state of mind and feeling; marketers assume that youth's natural desire for freedom will lead them to consumption. Yet ironically, it is at the heart of consumption, the shopping centre or mall, that the youth is least welcome. Singapore Council of Social Service (SCSS) survey of youths who frequented popular shopping areas in Singapore categorised these youth as "unattached". The report explains (SCSS, 1990):

in the Singaporean context it means that they do not belong to any Residents' Committees, Community Centres, religious groups or other youth agencies. With a lot of time on their hands, they hang around in the streets, fast-food joints or in the neighbourhood. This makes them vulnerable to negative social influences and petty crimes [*sic*]. Some of them may get involved in shoplifting, vandalism, gang-fights, glue sniffing, etc. (p. 1)

Similarly, at The Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota there is a six p.m. curfew for unchaperoned persons under 16 years of age. In an article about the initiation of the Mighty Mums programme (refer to figure 4.4) it claims that "the mall used to have a lot of kids using bad language, running or harassing visitors and now it's down to a bare minimum" ("Mum's the word", 1996). Throughout the article, the implication is that youth are not exactly legitimate visitors, unlike their adult counterparts. They are unruly and need to be kept in check; they cannot be trusted to behave according to predominant social norms.

Underlying both the Singaporean research and the Mighty Mums programme is the prevailing notion of docility aiming “to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits” (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). Youth is constructed as a stage of preparation and training, a legitimised site for government. As with the historical alliance of the doctor and the educator with the mother to institute health care and education in the modern family (Donzelot, 1979, p. 94); the mother has been literally orchestrated into this mechanism of social surveillance in the context of the mall.

Mum's the word at unruly US mall



Last year, the Mall initiated a Mighty Mums programme to help keep order among youngsters.

MS BRANDY MADSEN, a security officer, approached a group of five teenagers on one of her regular Friday night sweeps inside the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, the country's largest shopping centre.

With a crispness befitting her uniform, she asked them: "Are you all aware of our parental escort policy?"

Then Ms Madsen, 21, began checking IDs. It was 6.30 pm, half an hour after the mall's curfew for unchaperoned youngsters under 16.

Then the situation took a potentially unpleasant turn in a way that has been repeated countless times in the four-year-old mall. One of the young men hurled an obscenity at the guard and started to edge away. Shoppers began to stop and stare.

Then Ms Madsen turned to her secret weapon: Her partner, Ms Va-Lesha Beeks, 25, who was wearing a baseball cap reading "Mighty Mums".

Ms Beeks, who has two children and is eight months' pregnant with her third, put her hand on the young man's shoulder and shushed him with a finger to her lips.

He told Ms Beeks that he had been "harassed by the cops eight times in recent weeks because he and his friends are of Cambodian descent.

"I promise you that's not why you were checked and I'm sorry if we disrespected you," Ms Beeks said. "We know you're good kids but we've got to check everybody because otherwise it would be discrimination."

The young man nodded and dug out his driver's licence. He was 19. "Have a good night," Ms Beeks said, then chatted with him for a few minutes about new movies.

"Sometimes you need the authority of a security officer to make things right," she said when all was quiet, "and sometimes you just need a mum."

That wisdom is at the heart of the Mighty Mums programme, which was inaugurated by the Mall of America last spring to help keep order at the 4.2 million sq-ft city of 520 stores and a 7-acre amusement park.

Forty million people will visit the mall this year, and they make up a cross section of the acquisitive that ranges from wealthy shopping junketeers flown in from Switzerland to bus commuters from Minneapolis, 24.1 km away.

On a Saturday night, the mall becomes the third-largest population centre in Minnesota. In the past, as many as 5,000 of those Saturday night visitors were unsupervised young people. Groups of 50 would often block store entrances or move en masse through the hallways.

In 1993, shots were fired in a dispute over a jacket. And earlier this year, a gun was pointed at a tourist caught in the food court in a

chase between groups of black and Asian teenagers. One gruesome joke that arose from the incident was that the mall should change its slogan from "Put some fun in your life" to "Run for your life".

Then last January, a group of mothers was recruited from local community-service agencies, churches and school groups to join the mall's 150-member security force on patrol. The 20 mothers, who receive US\$20 (S\$21.3) an hour for five-hour shifts, are armed only with training in what they call "verbal judo".

Cases of actual violence are handled by uniformed guards and the Bloomington police, but the mothers are especially effective in heading off incidents that can be defused better with a friendly chat than with a

Cases of actual violence are handled by uniformed guards but the mothers are especially effective in heading off incidents that can be defused better with a friendly chat than with a badge

badge. And since September, the Mighty Mums have been supplemented by 10 fathers, called Dedicated Dads.

So far, the combination of the curfew, now two months old, and parental involvement seems to be working. "Last year at this time, there would be 10 kids arrested every weekend night for fighting, and now we have none," said Ms Teresa McFarland, the mall's spokeswoman. The Bloomington Police Department has cut the number of officers on duty at the mall from 12 to 6.

"The Mighty Mums have a lot to do with that success," said Mr Richard Mammen, a director of Change Inc in Minneapolis, an urban-policy consulting group hired by the mall to help with youth relations.

"We know some kids don't respond well to authority figures, especially ones in uniform. But usually they will listen to a mum. The mall used to have a lot of kids using bad language, running or harassing visitors and now it's down to a bare minimum."

The Mighty Mums programme is the first and only one of its kind in the nation, said Mr Mark Scholfet, spokesman for the International Council of Shopping Centres in New York. "The approach of using parents to help patrol malls is being watched carefully by others in the industry," he said. — NYT

Keeping in touch with, or keeping tabs on, youth?

Offenders may be sent into the community wearing an electronically-monitored bracelet instead of getting a jail sentence under new laws which take effect today . . . people on bail under home detention programs now wear the secured black plastic electronic bracelets which allow them to be contacted via a computer day or night. Calls must be responded to immediately by inserting the bracelet into a monitor connected to the telephone. If there is no response, a supervisor is alerted and the offender tracked down.

The West Australian (Pryer, 1996, p. 3)

Instead of jail sentences, incarceration, and the exercise of physical force, judges and magistrates in Western Australia can now place intensive supervision orders on offenders among which include electronic supervision with the aid of bracelets. Whilst offenders may no longer be contained in fortress-like architecture under lock and key, the electronic bracelet much like Bentham's Panopticon is a technique or technology through which disciplinary power is able to function. Both rely on "'surveillance' and the internal training this produces to incite states of docility" (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 67). The justice system can thus continue to regulate, though not unproblematically, the spaces offenders may legitimately occupy; subjecting individuals to the prospect of constant scrutiny, without confining them to the enclosure associated with jails.

Conceptually, the bracelet surpasses the Panopticon in its potential to *partition* individuals; a technique that serves to produce docile bodies by aiming to (Foucault, 1977):

establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. (p. 143)

When analysed in the context of offenders/transgressors/the abnormal, the application and attachment of such a device to the body is perceived to be an evident and desirable mechanism of power; a necessary method of manipulating and controlling the otherwise socially aberrant. Yet techniques of surveillance are not confined to penitentiaries and other institutions that are concerned with law enforcement. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) argues that schools, factories, barracks, hospitals and prisons all share common instruments and techniques used by the operations of disciplinary power:

‘discipline’ may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology. (p. 215)

Whilst the electronic bracelet is used to discipline social deviants in West Australia, in Britain a nursery school has fitted toddlers with electronic tags to protect them from abduction (see figure 4.5). Specifically, I am referring to the discipline-mechanism associated with panopticism which rather than enforcing through physical coercion, functions through subtle coercion with a schema of generalised surveillance resulting in what Foucault (1977, p. 209) terms “the disciplinary society”:

It is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (Foucault, 1977, p. 217).

The point is that the discipline-mechanism is embedded in society, it defines what is normal and abnormal, orders human multiplicities. Doctrines of free expression, of the self and autonomous self-governance “must limit even as they define; for to set out criteria for freedom and humanness is simultaneously to police conduct *politely* [my italics]” (Miller, 1993, p. xxiii).



A three-year-old fitted with an electronic tag at the nursery. The device is similar to those used in clothing stores to deter shoplifters. It triggers an alarm if the child passes through the gate or perimeter fence. — IPS picture.

Electronic tags keep tabs on pupils at nursery

LONDON — A British nursery school has fitted toddlers with electronic tags to try to ensure their safety.

The gates and perimeter fence are fitted with sensors which will sound an alarm if a child wearing a tag goes past.

The move by the school in Middleton in the West Midlands is believed to be the first of its kind in Britain, although creches in shopping centres have been using tagging systems since the killing of two-year-old James Bulger who was abducted in 1993.

The system costs £20,000 (\$47,000) to install. The tags — similar to those used in clothing stores to deter shoplifters — are fitted to fluorescent belts which stay on even when the children are dancing or having riding lessons in the 8,000-sq-m grounds.

Nursery owner Dawn MacLachlan brought in Sensor-matic, the British firm responsible for security at the Atlanta Olympics to set up the system.

Mrs MacLachlan said her concern about security measures was heightened by the attack by a gunman on a school in Dunblane.

"In the school itself, we have locks and bolts as much to keep people out as pupils in.

"If the alarm goes off, the closed circuit TV camera at the gate immediately scans the area so that if someone has tried to abduct a child, he is captured on video." — IPS.

Figure 4.5 Press clipping "Electronic tags keep tabs" in *The Straits Times* (1996)

I have gone into great detail to insert the use of these black plastic electronic bracelets into the "anatomy" of disciplinary power it operates in, to make the point that the device on its own bears little significance. It is in its use and application as *part* of a technology that it gains meaning. Therefore, when I refer to technology, I do not mean the object itself, the hardware and its technical capacity to aid human activity; but rather its implication in social institutions, at the intersections of social discourses. From a broadly structuralist perspective, this position "claims that individual phenomena have meaning only by virtue of their relation to other phenomena as elements within a systematic structure" (Milner, 1991, p. 61) in an attempt to move away from theories of technological determinism that isolate technology from society, and develop cause and effect relationships. Technology *is* cultural; it is only meaningful as part of human activity sustained by human knowledge (Hawkes, 1977, p. 17): "the true nature of things may be said to lie not in things themselves, but in the relationships which we construct, and then perceive, between them". Thus this is an attempt at interrogating the relationships we construct and then perceive between technology and society; the assumptions we build around the interface between individuals and technology.

Where does the pager fit in? As an electronic device, the pager is fairly similar to the electronic bracelets worn by offenders in the West Australian penal system in that both serve to allow their wearers to be contacted regardless of where they are. Both are concerned with knowing where and how to locate individuals. Yet whilst the idea of surveillance and discipline sits comfortably with the application of the device in the context of the penal system; for most, the pager marketed with notions of freedom, individuality, convenience, trendiness and youthfulness makes an awkward fit with disciplinary scrutiny. It is this awkwardness in the juxtaposition that I find interesting as it questions our assumptions and perceptions of the true nature of technologies and of individuals. Such an analysis also questions the extent to which the new communication technologies are new; or whether they are merely different ways of reproducing similar regimes and relations?

The pager, although it has that potential, does not literally place the teenager under surveillance like electronic bracelets or tags. However it latches onto one of the distinct qualities of youth that is often attached to this category; one of constant movement, lacking a legitimate space to occupy. The business person needs a pager because he or she needs to be everywhere at the same time. He or she is vital. The youth needs a pager because he or she hangs out at malls, fast-food restaurants or the streets; the anomalous public/private spaces where contacting the individual is difficult. The youth has few legitimate spaces to occupy other than the home, the school or some other social agency. In public, they are said to lounge, loiter, and hang around. They are not vital but rather deviant. They are identified by their defiance of the "normal", accepted use of public space. They need the pager because they have no place; both literally and metaphorically.

Conclusion

Youth, technology and communication studies: Some concluding remarks

The Swatch pager may not have been a marketing success. But the pager is here to stay for quite awhile. There are now pagers that can page you when you receive e-mail, take messages up to 200 characters long, store telephone numbers, remind you of appointments, and even transmit data. Costs of running a pager are also relatively low (in Singapore, prices range from S\$160.00 to S\$173.00 annually for a numeric or message service). Rather than being superseded by the mobile telephone, the pager is cleaving itself to the form of our bodies. What is our relationship with this technology? Or rather how does this relationship intersect with our cultural and social worlds?

In examining the pager, I am not trying to suggest that it has reinvented what youth means or what youth is. I do not suggest that it is a revolutionary technology. However, I have been asking how our existing knowledges of the relationship between technology/media and individuals, explain pagers and youth. The critique is of the conditions and knowledges that are articulated in the network of discourses around pagers, youth and technology. The intention is to ask, as does Foucault (McHoul & Grace, 1993):

What is our historical present? What are the institutions and systems of knowledge that critical theorists think they can readily identify? What are the relationships between them within particular ensembles which characterise our present epoch? (pp. 73-4)

It is important to note that studies of youth in communication studies are difficult to totally extract from the discourses of marketing, psychology and deviancy that I have identified in chapters three and four. As within the history of the discipline communication studies itself, the study of youth draws from the traditions of sociology, psychology, literary studies, subcultural theory, anthropology; the list can go on. Each have their own techniques of inserting the individual into the social machinery by identifying the youth and assigning different qualities to such a category. Buckingham (1993b) concludes that:

ultimately, then, the relationship between young people and the media has been defined by mainstream academic research as a *psychological* issue - as it was to a large extent by Plato. It is a matter of what the media do to young people's minds - or, more recently, what their minds do with the media. Young people are implicitly regarded here as somehow asocial - or perhaps pre-social - beings. They are merely on their way to becoming something else, something finished. (p. 9)

The same criticisms I have made of marketing, social organisations and governments also apply to communication research to some extent. To explain the youth-pager relationship in terms of an assumption of the nature of youth as an age defined, psychologically rooted, asocial state of "becoming" does not bring anything epistemologically new to the discussion. It does not build upon nor question what we claim "we already know".

Yet in different contexts what is understood as youth can range from the ages of 10 to 30 [the National Youth Council of Singapore (n.d.) defines youth as those between 15 and 30 years old]. Deviant youth or the vulnerability of youth to deviancy draws attention to this demographic. In other words, “normal” youth are often rendered invisible against spectacular subcultures and boundary defying behaviour (Aries, 1960):

New sciences such as psycho-analysis, paediatrics and psychology devote themselves to the problems of childhood, and their findings are transmitted to parents by way of a mass popular literature. Our world is obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood. (p. 395)

We continually return to the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood and youth; but the adult pathologising of youth catches itself in a self-fulfilling cycle. The categorisation of youth is a way of creating masses. Young people do have an empirical existence, but we need to see that when we speak of youth we defer to a technique of knowing, for youth in their totality are not practically “knowable”. These are issues that are not often addressed.

I have included a great number of texts in this paper, some academic, but mostly journalistic, governmental and commercial (I have made it a point to identify these sources when reproducing texts from them). This is to make the point that meaning negotiation occurs at multiple sites; discourses are information flows rather than bounded texts. Whilst these texts have different levels of legitimacy in the context of academic writing such as this thesis, their inclusion challenges the position of the researcher, and the history of her discipline, as powerful looker against the powerless looked at subject. Discourses on youth and technology cut across the political,

economic, national, international, social and cultural. To speak of the relationship between the pager, youth, and technology, is to also speak of the political, economic, social and cultural contexts of this relationship. I am interrogating both the practice of criticism and subject of criticism to problematise the neat separation of each element.

The pager itself is not the focus of this study. As an object, it has little meaning. It is in its use, in the discourses it draws together, the relationships it constructs; that meaning is negotiated. Technology is understood in the Foucauldian sense as techniques which allow for the exercise of power and the production of knowledge (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 86). My method is problematic particularly since I only analyse the knowledge produced by the supposedly powerful knowledge classes. It is a limitation in light of my concern with the conception and study of individuals grouped as audiences within communication studies. I found it difficult, due to my limited experience, to conduct interviews with young pager owners. I was constantly faced with generic responses. However this is still an area that requires investigation. Within my existing analysis, I have limited myself to issues of consumerism and delinquency. Although these are dominant discourses around youth, there are other elements such as class and gender that I have not considered. I do not assume my paper to be conclusive in any way, and I hope to have raised more questions than I can answer. It is consciously contingent; and is only one aspect of the "comprehensive, interdisciplinary, collective cultural study" that Budd. Entman and Steinman (1990, p. 180) call for.

Communication is about power, the power to control knowledge. Communication studies itself cannot be wholly positioned outside of these inescapable conditions (Foucault, 1978):

the manifold relations of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. (p. 94)

Bear in mind that power produces: the subject, "reality", domains of objects, and rituals of truth. The place of this critical inquiry is to question that production that contextualises intellectual work and everyday life (not that they are mutually exclusive). By examining communication studies, youth, technology and pagers in relation to one another, our intellectual and everyday assumptions are questioned. The relations we draw between things and ourselves are just that: relative. It is a pointed interrogation of how we make sense.

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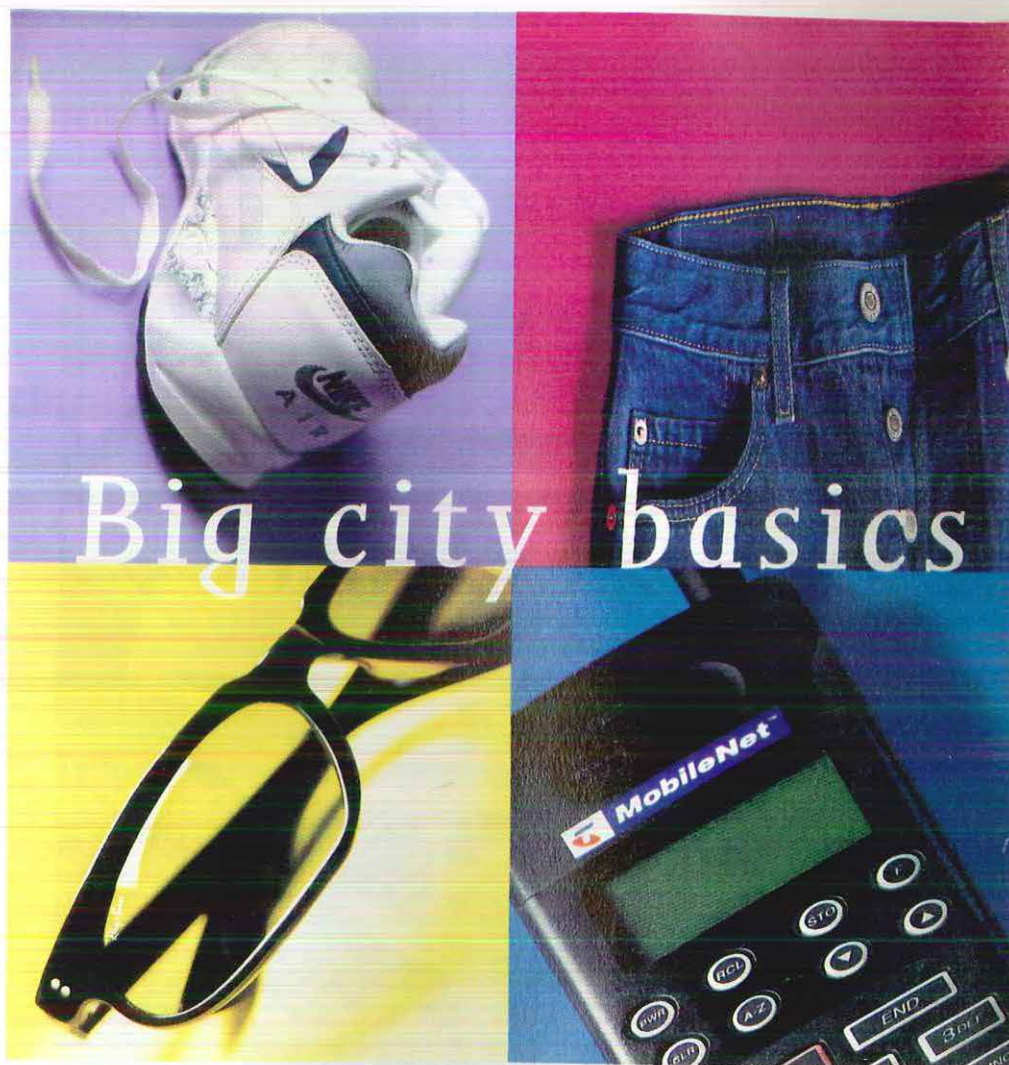
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Appendix

The following are a sample of texts that reflect the changing relationship between technologies and users/ audiences mentioned in this paper. In addition, I have included the Swatch advertisements specifically to illustrate the sense of spectacle that they create and/or elicit.

The first three images are from the Telstra "Priced to fit every pocket" print advertising campaign. The subsequent advertisements are for Swatch watches.



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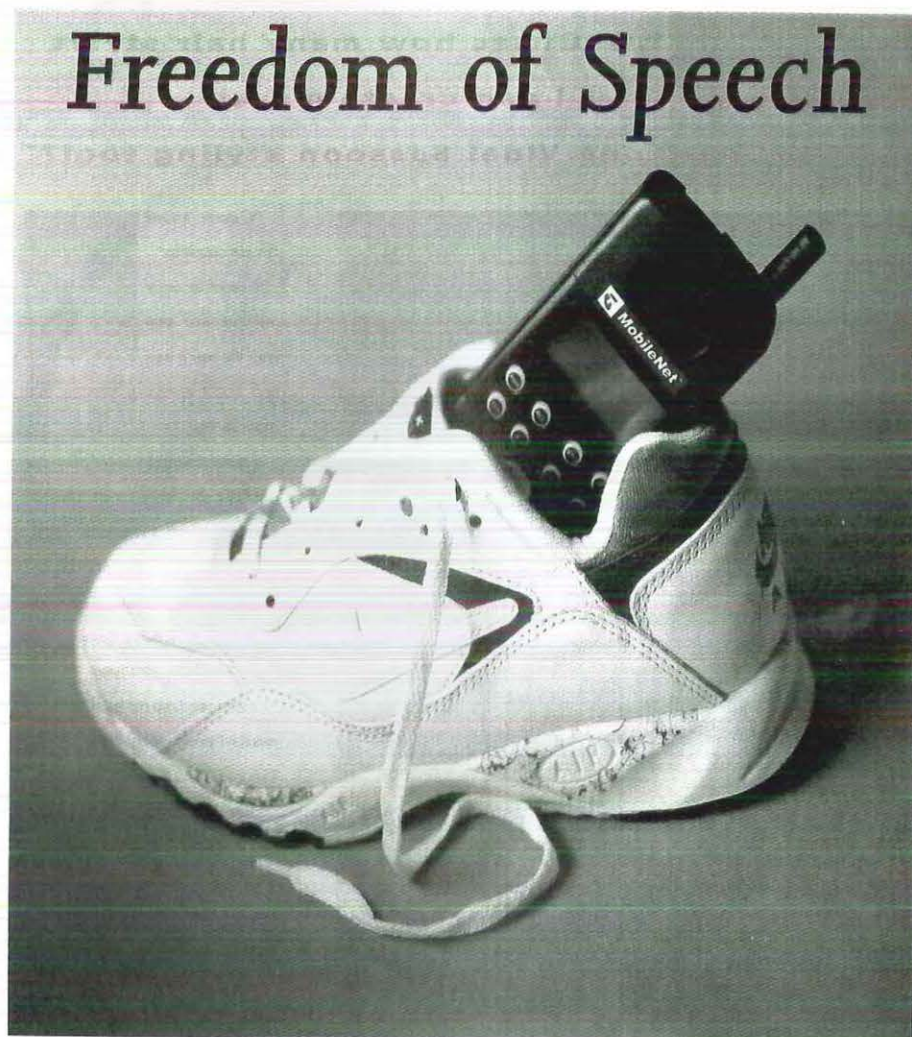
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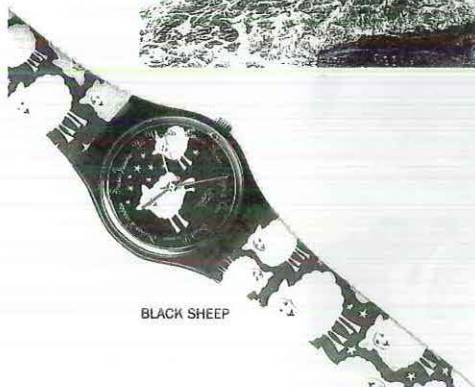
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